

THEATRICALITY AND FRENCH CINEMA:  
THE FILMS OF JACQUES RIVETTE

By

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Cinema spent its earlier years distinguishing itself from theater. The work of radical filmmaker Jacques Rivette paradoxically achieves renewal through reference to different forms of theatricality. This dissertation takes issue with the type of film criticism that locates the theatricality of Rivette's films as their determining flaw, measuring his work solely against the *zeitgeist* of the New Wave movement, which prized spontaneity and freedom from theatrical convention. This study argues for his centrality, both as a leading figure of the postwar French avant-garde and as a filmmaker whose work anticipated the postmodernist celebration of pleasure and the performative. This research re-envision the stylistic concerns of his cinema through the prism of theater aesthetics. Each chapter examines a different aspect of this single aesthetic impulse. Chapter 2 concentrates on the connection between the New Wave classic *Paris nous appartient* (1958-60) and the postwar existentialist theater of Jean-Paul Sartre. Chapter 3 focuses on the *succès à scandale* *La Religieuse* (1965-66), the banned

Diderot adaptation. Diderotian dramaturgy and Enlightenment pictorialism converge in the film with the scenography of Nô and Kabuki theater to produce a mode of active contemplation, characteristic of pre-May '68. Chapter 4 concentrates on the thirteen-hour *Out 1: Noli me tangere* (1970-71), where Rivette adopts an apocalyptic performance style based on French avant-garde theater aesthetics and Eastern European and American experimental theater of the 1960s. Chapter 5 discusses *Noroît* (1976) as participating in a distinct trend in French cinema that rethinks tenets of political modernism through the prism of opera and opera aesthetics. *Noroît's* operatic style, which is indebted to the fantastic dimension of composer Claude Debussy's modernist opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, represents Rivette's response to the accelerated crisis in the realm of representation in the wake of May '68. Chapter 6 shows how in *Haut bas fragile* (1995) Rivette fuses the performance aesthetic of the Happening with the American film musical and New York taxi-dance hall traditions to produce the abstract pleasure associated with early cinema and an avant-garde performance aesthetic. This dissertation puts into perspective the remarkable metamorphosis of Rivette's work from the New Wave to the Nineties.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Roland Barthes locates Baudelairien theatricality as wholly independent of theatrical realization properly speaking, envisioning it as “present in the germ of the work” (*Critical Essays* 26). Can “theatricality” as a *potential* presence in a non-theatrical work be understood in cinema? May we discuss the migration of certain qualities inherently theatrical from the stage to the screen? Elizabeth Burns would respond that inherently theatrical traits are nonexistent, arguing in *Theatricality: A Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life* that theatricality resides in interpretation, that it is a mode of perception (13). In “Performing Theory,” Marià Brewer concurs, defining theatricality as the term through which “interpretation, explicitly or not, designates and frames its own practice as performance” (2). In this dissertation, I focus on what I call “theatricality,” a politics of style that encompasses the manner in which the codes of theater, including gestural, iconic, and linguistic, are evident in profilmic texts. I use the world of theater as a contextual and theoretical framework in my discussion of Rivette, and thus, the term “theatricality” necessarily defines my own mode of interpretive engagement with the stylistic concerns of Jacques Rivette’s cinema.

A few preliminary words are essential to define the central term of my title. The definition of the term “theatricality” as a dramatic performance is key to this dissertation, insofar as I deal with the most obviously staged texts—the plays within the films. Among the five films that I have chosen to discuss, three make direct references to a play or plays:

a founding masterpiece of the New Wave, *Paris nous appartient* (1958-60) refers to Shakespeare's *Pericles* and *The Tempest*, the legendary experimental work *Out 1: Noli me tangere* (1970-71) cites Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* and *Seven Against Thebes*, the third part of a four part film series *Les filles du feu* or *Scènes de la vie parallèle*, *Noroît* (1976) announces itself as an adaptation of Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Although the *succès de scandale*, *Suzanne Simonin: La Religieuse de Denis Diderot* (1965-66), an adaptation of Denis Diderot's eighteenth-century novel, bears no apparent relation to theater, Rivette constructed the film from a theater performance at Studio des Champs Elysées, which he directed. The recent *Haut Bas Fragile* (1995) relies on the theatrical performance style associated with early cinema and the taxi-dance halls of the 1920s and 1930s.

While I use the term "theatricality" to refer to the staged plays within Rivette's films, I am also using this term as a more inclusive and reflexive concept in order to theorize the significance of Jacques Rivette's avant-garde film practice. My definition of "theatricality" must be differentiated from other terms borrowed from theater—*melodramatic*, *stagey*. Such terms, as Jonas Barish has observed in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, tend to be hostile or belittling, as do expressions drawn from theatrical activity: *playacting*, *putting on an act*, *making a scene*, *making a spectacle of oneself*, *playing to the gallery* (1). Such terms are not confined to English, as Barish points out, for the French point to those who *jouent la comédie* (put on an act) or scornfully, to an action that it was merely *du théâtre* (playacting) (1). Barish affirms that such pejorative expressions embody, in current idioms, the vestiges of a prejudice against the theater that can be traced as far back in European history as the theater itself (1). Indeed, the *Oxford*

*English Dictionary*'s definition of the term "theatricality," betrays an antitheatrical prejudice; the term "theatrical" carries the semantic weight of all negative connotations, which are defined: "that simulates, or is simulated; artificial, affected, assumed; extravagantly or irrelevantly histrionic; 'stagy'; calculated for display, showy, spectacular" (883).

Predictably, the formal innovations Rivette experimented with in his early films were generally dismissed by film historians and critics as contrived and artificial—in a word, as "theatrical." In his assessment of *Paris nous appartient*, James Monaco in *The New Wave* dismisses the film for its forced, "theatrical" tone: "*Paris nous appartient* seemed to be exactly the kind of film one would expect a critic to make, full of what seemed like forced, false intellectual mystery: thin, monotonous, and lacking resonance" (308). Film historian Roy Armes upholds Monaco's appraisal in his assertion that "The tone never varies, the dialogue is flat and the photography, although competent, is never striking. The film's major defect is its failure to create any sort of dramatic tension" (182). Rivette's film style is framed critically—even, retrospectively, by Rivette himself—from within the context of the New Wave avant-garde film movement that prized spontaneity and freedom from convention.<sup>1</sup> Rivette's auto-critique and the perception of the film common among New Wave historians seem to perpetuate the idea that the film's artificial, affected, "theatrical" tone was the source of its failure. In his first article for *Cahiers du Cinéma* entitled "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," the young critic François Truffaut formulated the *zeitgeist* of the New Wave by opposing it to "theatrical" Tradition of Quality productions of the 1950s. The films' dialogue, derived from literary classics and adapted by scriptwriters Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, was complemented



by the *metteur-en-scène*'s use of "scholarly framing, complicated lighting-effects, 'polished' photography" to manufacture the artificial studio style that Truffaut denounced (230). The New Wave was formulated in opposition to the Tradition of Quality cinema of the 1950s; its filmmakers were applauded for their ability to wipe the slate clean of the artificially "staged" look that threatened to compromise film's status as an autonomous art.

A few preliminary words are necessary to trace the history of the term "theatricality" that is central to my discussion. Soviet semiotician Jurii M. Lotman in "Theater and Theatricality in the Order of Early Nineteenth Century Culture" uses the term "theatricality" to define the situation in which the realm of theater influences life, a condition that he argues prevailed in Western Europe and in Russia at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth (33). Lotman contends that it is not only the actor in the theater who undergoes a "reincarnation," but the whole world, which "reorganizes itself according to the laws of theatrical space, entering which, things become the signs of things" (33). The theatricalization or ritualization of real life opened up the possibility of transformation for the ordinary Russian eighteenth-century gentleman/woman, who lived to a considerable degree beneath the sign of custom (56). The ability to envision the theatricality of everyday life liberated men and women from "plotless" lives, providing them with an outlet beyond the routine of everyday life. The unanticipated intervention of *suzhetnost* (plot) allowed them to imagine themselves in the roles of historical personages, enabling them then to assume these roles and influence the world (57). Lotman affirms that the revolutionary consciousness of the gentry youth of the early nineteenth century had been psychologically prepared by the habit of envisioning

life “theatrically,” which meant “transforming a person into a *character*,” and thereby liberating him “from the automatic power of group behavior of custom” (57). The notion of theatricality ultimately established the awareness that all types of political occurrences were possible.

While Lotman emphasizes the role of theater in real life, sociologist and theater historian Elizabeth Burns explores “the double relationship” between the theatre and social life, which she defines as “theatricality” itself (2). Burns focuses on the theatrical metaphor that arises from the ambiguous vision of life as a stage, and of the stage as a representation of life, and of social life as “unreal” (3). Thus, for Burns an understanding of theatricality “depends on the perception of the two-way process whereby drama in performance is both formed by and helps to re-form and so conserve or change the values and norms of the society which supports it [ . . . ]” (3-4). Especially illuminating are those extreme instances Burns cites where the world of social reality becomes fused with the theatrical presentation. She points to Grotowski’s Laboratory Theatre productions, where spectators themselves are expected to take part in the performances and thereby create what Grotowski describes as “a secular sacrum in the theatre” (57). Burns observes, however, that such fusion might be perceived as a contradiction of the aim of theatrical presentation, which is “to define *and by definition to relate* two kinds of experience, that of the familiar commonsense world and that of the theatrical world, in such a way that they illuminate each other” (49).

Having described the invasion of the realm of theater by real life, Burns then turns to the theatricalisation of public life. She observes that real action and theater were combined in the 1968 May events in Paris (93). The decoration of the walls of buildings

with political slogans helped transform the street into a place for participants to sit and thus, according to Burns, converted a public place into a stage set for a specific occasion (94). Burns's description of the street demonstrations during the 1968 cultural revolution recalls Lotman's characterization of the early nineteenth century when the theatrical metaphor was widely used, transforming royal, military, and civic ceremonies into highly visible theatrical spectacles. For Burns, the events of May 1968 represented a rediscovery of theatricality as a mode of acting out ordinary life. For Burns and Lotman, the theatricality associated with street demonstrations and parades represented a challenge to bourgeois withdrawal into private life (Burns 94).

Burns and Lotman use the term theatricality to define the relation between theater and the social world. Such definitions are pertinent to this project, which envisions an alternative to the type of Rivette film criticism that locates the theatricality of his films as their determining flaw. I argue that dismissal of Rivette is not only inherently misguided, but reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of Rivette's acute awareness of the diverse notions of theatricality that inform his work. Indeed, Rivette's penetrating critical pieces composed for *Cahiers du Cinéma* where he worked during his first ten years in Paris are as internationally recognized as his films. Rivette owes his critical acuity, in part, to the mentorship of film theorist André Bazin, whose formulation of an ontology of cinema broke new theoretical ground, providing justification for a cinema based on the principles of realism. Bazin's theory of cinematic realism preoccupied the postwar intellectual and artistic community, yet it was the debate concerning the interrelation between theater and cinema that most deeply concerned Rivette. In his seminal essay from 1951, "Theater and Cinema," Bazin responded to those French critics who had been using the notion of the

“irreplaceable presence of the actor” to construct an unbridgeable aesthetic moat between theater and cinema. He targets Rosenkrantz who had proclaimed in a 1937 article in *Esprit*: “The characters on the screen are quite naturally objects of identification, while those on the stage are, rather, objects of mental opposition because their real presence gives them an objective reality [. . .]” (qtd. in Bazin 99). Bazin challenges such commonplaces of theatrical criticism to introduce a strangely paradoxical notion of presence: “It [cinema] makes a molding of the object as it exists in time and, furthermore, makes an imprint of the duration of the object” (97). He sees cinematic presence as both delayed and deferred and concludes: “It is false to say that the screen is incapable of putting us ‘in the presence of’ the actor. It does so in the same way as a mirror—one must agree that the mirror relays the presence of the person reflected in it—but it is a mirror with a delayed reflection, the tin foil of which retains the image” (97). Bazin shrewdly transfers the problem of the actor’s presence from the ontological to the psychological level, placing in the hands of the director the degree to which spectator participation in the cinema is passive or active.

Dismissing the notion of the actor’s presence as an issue that definitively sets theater apart from cinema, Bazin proceeds to locate cinematic specificity in décor. Bazin attributes the specificity of cinema to a founding lack, for “[. . .] one could say that in the best films something is missing. It is as if a certain inevitable lowering of the voltage, some mysterious aesthetic short circuit, deprived us in the cinema of a certain tension which is a definite part of theater” (98). Yet this lack to which Bazin refers does not refer simply to the cinema’s formal properties but to the perceived historical, literary, and cultural lack, the inferiority complex that cinema bears beneath the weight of its ancestor,

the theater. Bazin points to metteurs-en-scène such as Georges Méliès, who used the old art of theater in the new cinema, with the actors facing the public (78). Such examples permit Bazin to conclude that primitive cinema served as both an extension and a refinement of the theater. This observation serves as the theoretical impetus for his formulation of cinematic specificity—the independent stance of the cinema as a mature art form (87). By focusing on cinema's inferiority complex with respect to the theater, Bazin is able to free the cinema from theater, locating its specificity within a dramaturgy of nature where the actor is no longer required. Bazin attempted to reclaim a realist cinema from its association with the theatrical tableau by aligning it with the quotidian and the authentic. Theatricality, by comparison, is shown to be a closed and conventional space, a *locus dramaticus* where theatrical ritual is cut off from the real world, a stage where the plasticity of the body is perceived as central to the scene.

Bazin's theoretical speculations on the relation between the theater and the cinema remain extremely pertinent to this project that focuses on theatricality in Rivette's films. The theatricality that remains the hallmark of Rivette's *oeuvre* can be viewed, in some sense, as an implicit response to Bazin. Bazin sought to carve out a space for realist cinema by severing it from theatrical décor: Rivette uses the theatrical tableau to rediscover a true realism. Rivette does not seek to theatricalize cinema, transforming it into a lesser descendent of theater; rather, as Jacques Aumont affirms, he permits cinema to follow its dramatic inclination, while paradoxically placing this on display (234). As Aumont observes, "[theater] is one of those places where cinema finds refuge, against the dictatorial style of commercials" (my translation, 234). Rivette uses theater to assist him in achieving what he believes to be cinema's true vocation—to encounter the real. For

Rivette, the theater is not cinema's enemy, but its ally in a more difficult mission, which, in Aumont's terms, is to achieve—against the facility of the cinematic machine—a true realism (236).

Yet, Rivette's form of reflexivity must be distinguished from the materialist cinema promoted primarily by British Marxist critics during the 1960s and 1970s. Marxist critics at the British journal *Screen* applauded films that foregrounded their own rhetorical codes designed to reproduce the real, specifically through the preferred Brechtian strategy of emphasizing the means of representation at the expense of mimesis. *Screen* theorist Stephen Heath argued in the celebrated article "Narrative Space" that codes of camera perspective code must never be confused with the "natural" or the "authentic"; he delineates the camera's "artificial" quality that was modeled on the geometrical perspective of Renaissance painting and theater sets (80). Materialists lambasted the classical Hollywood cinema that sought to redeem "the real" through continuity editing, thereby perfecting the Aristotelian notion of mimesis at the basis of the Renaissance theatrical tableau (Orgel 35). At the point where classical Hollywood cinema sought to "theatrically" fabricate a unified identity, Marxists like Heath advocated Brechtian cinema, which would use theatrical strategies to divide it. A Brechtian cinema, they felt, would incorporate the principles of a non-Aristotelian dramaturgy, independent of both identification and mimesis, to achieve the political effect of distancing.

In contradistinction to the reflexivity of materialist cinema, Rivette's films participate in the wider political, artistic, and social trends of postwar France with its renewed interest in such categories as aesthetics, subjectivity, and experience as a response to the postwar crisis in the realm of representation. The crisis in representation

was precipitated by the arrival of television in the 1950s, which was accompanied by the inundation of high capitalist Hollywood spectacle. Youssef Ishaghpour associates the contemporary crisis with the world-historical “decline of the aura,” which Walter Benjamin in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” attributed to the increased intervention of technical means in the production and reception of art in the twentieth century (222). The theatrical tendency characteristic of cinematographic modernity emerged in response to what Guy Debord terms “this banalizing trend,” which entailed an accelerated loss of meaning and reduction of image information to the ephemeral (38). The theatrical tendency of Rivette’s cinema protested the reintegration of art into the mundane world of utilitarian consumerism by promising a restoration of aura through recourse to a secularized ritual.

I argue that the theatricality of Rivette’s cinema challenges the cultural dominant through a return to ritual and myth. A discussion of the historical significance of theatrical ritual and its potential for cinema unites the chapters. Chapter 2, “An Investigation of Theatricality: Postwar Paris and *Paris nous appartient*,” traces the connection between Rivette’s cinema and the existentialist theater of Sartre that originated in Occupation Paris. In his theoretical formulation of a theater of situations, Sartre advocated the establishment of distance between spectator and spectacle through ritual. Yet Sartre did not endorse the pedagogical epic theater of Brecht, who, he felt, mistakenly believed that one can present society as an object to the audience. In his critique of Brechtian theater, Sartre maintained that the critical response of spectators steeped in mystification could not be trusted, so his theater would provide a countermystification. The situationist theater would serve as a mediatory ground between the two forms of drama and thus would

neither entirely dispense with spectator participation nor indulge in the sympathetic extremes to which bourgeois dramatic theater was prone. Myth mediated between opposed dramatic styles within Sartrean theater; whereas, the myth of the theater (and of lost theaters) inflects Rivette's first feature *Paris nous appartient*. Rivette's aesthetic offers a countermystification, a Sartrean rite in response to a world entranced by rites. Myth, which was the main tenet of situationist theater, later shapes Rivette's cinema.

The ceremonial participation of Sartrean drama occurs in *Paris nous appartient*, transforming the spectator into both a witness of and participant in a conspiratorial rite. The film's textual organization closely conforms to the underlying structure of the conspiracy myth that preoccupied mid-nineteenth century Paris, where the obsession with crime, criminals, and conspiracies captivated all classes. Rivette borrows the myth of the Parisian criminal from nineteenth-century novelist Honoré de Balzac. Balzac's description detailed in *Code des gens honnêtes* and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* complements the depiction of the actor found in the theoretical treatises of Denis Diderot. The city of Balzacian conspiracies and protean criminals constructs the parameters, the mysterious, haunted dimensions of the Rivettian landscape that resurfaces in later films.

Chapter 3, "The Theatrical Tableaux of *La Religieuse*: The Contemplative Moment of Pre-May 1968," explores the tableau—the theatrical scene and the pictorial tableau—as the interface to unite literary form and film form. I argue that the theatricality that defines Denis Diderot's eighteenth-century novel also defines the film: It resides in the tableau. The pictorial tableau, for Rivette, becomes emblematic of the generic pleasure of possessing the text, thereby allowing the filmmaker to indulge in the fantasy that he can fully possess the novel through film. It is not only the theatricality, the



dramatic compositions, of classical figurative painting but also that of the theater that Rivette adopts to stage Diderot's novel. Indeed, the intertextual interaction between cinema and painting in Rivette's film relies on what Dalle Vacche describes as, "a shared sense of theatrical space, one not based on artificial display but linked to the world through the presence of actors" (82). The conjoining of pictorial tableau and theater scenography within *La Religieuse* subtends Rivette's fantasy of possession of Diderot's text; however, the filmmaker also recognizes that his illusion of possession, which propels the adaptation, must remain unattainable.

Rivette also borrows the music and dance of Nô drama as a means to prolong and to accentuate both lyrical and dramatic moments, placing distance between the spectator and the spectacle by providing an implicit commentary on the violent nature of events within the convent walls. The distancing effect created through the use of songs and words within *La Religieuse* is sustained through the mechanics of an Asian acting style that is commensurate with Diderotian dramaturgy. The centrality of the actor within the drama is key to the performance style of both Nô and Kabuki drama. Rivette's method that offers the audience a series of fluid forms coming into "fixation" one after another in successive tableaux is commensurable with Kabuki staging, which focuses the attention of the audience on the fixed moment of the actor or actress's pose or *mie*. Rivette draws on the dedramatization and the distance of Japanese theater; it allows him to present "an image" of the situation, rather than to decompose the situation in montage and to develop character psychology. Rivette explores the manner in which Japanese theater and dance aesthetics work in conjunction with Diderotian dramaturgy in *La Religieuse*, in which

successive tableaux demand an active contemplation that opens up a possibility in the brutal opposition between identification and analysis.

Chapter 4, “Aeschylus, Artaud, and the Absurd: The Post-68 Reverie of *Out 1*: *Noli me tangere*,” considers the stylistic revolution represented by the thirteen-hour experimental film *Out 1* as coincident with the cultural revolution in France following the events of May 1968. A testament to the radical moment of cultural change, *Out 1* surpasses the boundaries of narrative, script, and acting style, which Rivette felt had constrained him during the filming of *La Religieuse*, to enter into a new dimension in filmmaking. I discuss how in *Out 1*, Rivette moves away from classical theater and the Italian Renaissance stage that largely determines the *mise-en-scène* of both *Paris nous appartient* and *La Religieuse*. Rivette refuses the static tableau and the introspective form of *La Religieuse* to adopt an exteriorized performance style in *Out 1*, which is based on French avant-garde theater aesthetics and the 1960s European and American experimental theater.

In *Out 1*, Rivette revolutionizes his approach to the filmed theater rehearsal, to which he had recourse in *Paris nous appartient*, using the perverse and subtle elements of Grotowskian drama to shock the audience into heightened awareness. Rivette’s revolutionary vision rejoins that of Antonin Artaud and the American Living Theater through ancient traditions—esoteric, primitive, mythic—in an attempt to rediscover the magic and mystery of the everyday world. Like Sartre, Artaud sought to restore to the theater its ritual dimension to liberate it from its servitude to psychology. Artaud’s visceral immediacy spoke to the post-May ‘68 generation, who regarded *Theater and Its Double* as a visionary work. Rivette’s transposition of Artaud’s theatrical language of

space in *Out 1* not only reflects the *zeitgeist* of the time but also points ahead to postmodern preoccupations with process, participation, and performance, rather than the authoritative and finished work of art.

*Out 1* is indebted not only to Artaud's "theater of cruelty" but also Eugene Ionesco's Absurdist theater, in its demand for the destruction of dramatic character. Like Artaud, Ionesco sought to regenerate theater through the invention of a metaphysical language of incantation, which would engage the spectator as a participant. Chants, incantations, children's songs protect the characters in *Out 1* from the menacing forces that surround them. It is through such covert forms of communication that the Balzacian underworld resurfaces in *Out 1*. The conspiracy (*complot*) of the utopian political group known as *Les Treize* offers the resources of its private language, its web-like organization to stave off humankind's primordial fears of death, existential isolation, and the loss of individuality. Rivette offers oneiric images of those fears, similar to the surrealism of Ionesco's stage productions, which he hopes will disturb the audience's familiar mode of experiencing the world. *Out 1* is an apotheosis in Rivette's *oeuvre*; he has absorbed Artaud's lessons in regard to theatrical language of *mise-en-scène*; he has responded to the Absurdist impulse in Ionesco; and has learned from Grotowski's precepts on *décor* and physical movement. Additionally, Rivette strives to maintain a certain distance between the spectator and the film spectacle, so that despite the film's recourse to Grotowskian confrontation, the film might be understood contemplatively (Clurman 162).

Chapter 5, "From Tourneur to Maeterlinck and Debussy: Sounding Out the Operatic in *Noroi*," traces a distinct trend in French cinema that rethinks tenets of political modernism through the prism of opera and opera aesthetics. As Debussy had

intuited that the crisis in harmony demanded the creation of a new music style, similarly, *Noroît*'s operatic style represented Rivette's response to the postwar crisis in the realm of representation, which accelerated following the subsequent events of May '68. I argue that the French and German debate in the realm of cinema aesthetics paralleled that of music: As the operatic style of Debussy profoundly opposes the negative aesthetic of Schoenberg, which necessitated the complete rejection of tonal harmony; so does the operatic style of *Noroît* directly oppose the anti-aesthetic tendency of Brechtian cinema, which was formulated in conscious opposition to the affirmative character of high capitalist Hollywood cinema. Debussy's opera of uncertainty inspired *Noroît*'s fantastic dimension that is created through theatrical mise-en-scène, elliptical verse, and improvised music. Opera's vocation—its affective and magical order—allows Rivette to turn away from the contemporary scene of *Out 1*, away from historical drama of *La Religieuse*, and turn instead towards mythic memory in *Noroît*. It is through opera—specifically Claude Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*—that Rivette remembers his friend and mentor Jean Cocteau.

Chapter 6, "Moving Backstage: From Taxi-Dance Hall to Depression Musical in *Haut bas fragile*," Rivette returns to and reinvents the kind of fascination that, as Tom Gunning contends, was prevalent in early cinema as well as in certain genres such as the musical (64). *Haut bas fragile* mobilizes multiple dance styles—the participatory aesthetic of the taxi-dance hall, the fluid rhythm and rhyme patterns of the depression era backstage musical, as well as the reflexivity of the 1950s MGM musical—in order to establish a musical liaison between the everyday world and the ceremonial space of performance.

Rather than producing the image of a utopian reality associated with Hollywood's vision of the musical performance, the musical numbers of *Haut bas fragile* accentuate the film's disjointed tone. The occasional narrative intrigues that engage the three women become mere pretexts for musical performances in which our attention is focused on the pleasure of sensual body movements of the characters that rock rhythmically or pose gratuitously as required by the demands of the music. Rivette's camera reinvents the medium-long shot style associated with primitive cinema as it moves cautiously across the bodies of characters whose dance movements unfold at a distance and in this manner, mimics its a-psychological mode of address. In *Haut bas fragile*, Rivette makes use of the dancer's capacity to convey images of rebellion from social constraints, transforming the taxi-dance hall into an alternative space where three modern-day women project themselves into multiple theatrical roles, transgressing social, class, and gender boundaries.

*Haut bas fragile* mobilizes American dance and musical styles to produce the abstract pleasure associated with the avant-garde performance aesthetic of the Happening. Similar to the Happening that relies on a hallucinatory estrangement associated with abstract rhythmic and visual patterns, Rivette's film insists on pleasure. The pleasure takes multiple forms: the fanciful narrative patterning found in the film, the musical dance performances that suspend narration to induce an entranced participation, and finally, the sheer physicality of plastic expression. In *Haut bas fragile*, Rivette returns to the primitive, plastic expression of dance that restores to the work of art its magical dimension and thereby, transforms the spectator into a visionary able to re-envision the world through an altered perception of it. The audience enters a trance-like state and is forced to encounter itself, its own reality as revealed in a ritualistic dance of the goddesses, which is

ultimately derived from Artaudian theater aesthetics. *Haut bas fragile* transforms the Paris landscape of Rivette's earlier films, such as his New Wave classic *Paris nous appartient* and the post-May '68 experimental film *Out 1*, into a multidimensional space of theatrical performance. Like Rivette's three *flâneuses*, the spectator is generously invited to become an impassioned participant in, as well as observer of, the everyday rituals of the city.

Having explained the sequencing and key issues of my chapters, I should now comment on my choice of films. Most readers will wonder why I have not included a chapter on *L'Amour fou* (1967-68), since it is this film that, nearly all would agree, most directly addresses the interrelation between theater and cinema. I must respond that when I was beginning my research, I discovered that the film was not available on video in either the United States or France. Its unavailability has since proven to be a fortuitous circumstance, for quite recently, H       Deschamps' exciting study *Jacques Rivette: Th      , amour, cin      * has appeared, bringing fresh theoretical insight to bear on the discussion of the interrelationship between the theater and the cinema in *L'Amour fou*. Her close textual analysis of this film and its citation of Racine's play *Andromaque* touches on many of the same theoretical questions that I address, particularly in my discussion of *Out 1*. She claims that the film is revolutionary, in the largest sense of the word, and allies it with the surrealist aesthetic of Andr       Breton: "While the revolt of '68 is dead, *L'Amour fou* remains a revolutionary film. An undaunted film that lives on. [. . .] It has the same title as Breton's novel, written in 1937, at the outbreak of another revolution" (my translation, 8). Deschamps argues that while the film stages French classical theater, its *mise-en-sc      * bears the traces of the avant-garde theater, specifically

Artaud and the Theater of the Absurd. Her claim for the revolutionary stature of *L'Amour fou* through its evocation of the surrealist intertext and its reliance on the subversive strategies of French avant-garde theater substantiate my own analysis of *Out 1*, a film that was released several years later. Unlike Deschamps, however, I have chosen to spread my inquiry into the theatricality of Rivette's cinema across different periods of Rivette's work, rather than relying on one case study.

*Céline and Julie vont en bateau/Celine and Julie Go Boating* (1973-1974) did not seem to warrant the extended treatment accorded here to *Out 1: Noli me tangere* or to *Noroît*, for this film attracted a wide international audience on its release and has since been discussed in detail both by Rivette in numerous interviews and by American and British film critics in articles published in *Jump Cut*, *Film Quarterly*, *Film Comment*, and *Positif*. Among the most notable treatments of this film, Stéphane Goudet's "*Céline et Julie vont en bateau: Les Spectratrices*" published in Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues' excellent anthology *Jacques Rivette, critique et cinéaste* provides a Deleuzian reassessment of the film, whose commercial release coincided with the crest of post-68 feminism. Liandrat-Guigues' seminal study of Rivette rejoins the recent work of French feminist scholars and film historians, who are engaged in a reevaluation of his cinema. She brings together a group of talented writers whose work is divided into two sections: The first is devoted to broader theoretical issues that inflect Rivette's work as a whole, such as the interrelation of theater and film, the discourse of melancholia in the films, and the role of Rivette as critic. The second part is devoted to the close analysis of those individual films that remain among the most celebrated of the *oeuvre*—*La Religieuse*, *La Belle Noiseuse*, *Jeanne La Pucelle*, and *Haut bas fragile*. While I also include films like *La*

*Religieuse* and *Haut bas fragile*, which have received considerable attention in both the popular and academic presses, I feel that films like *Out 1* and *Noroît*, which have received little or no attention by either French or American critics, warrant serious consideration at this time. While Liandrat-Guigues chooses to separate those essays that address broader theoretical issues from those that deal specifically with individual films, my project attempts to define a space of close analysis that fuses the two extremes; in each dissertation chapter, I focus on an individual film, using close textual analysis to achieve broad theoretical ends.

*Cahiers du Cinéma* critic Hélène Frappat achieves in her admirable auteurist study *Jacques Rivette: Secret Compris* what I could not attempt in this dissertation—a comprehensive study of the director’s work that commences with his first short film *Le Coup du Berger* (1956) and concludes with his most recent work *Va Savoir* (2000-1). This monograph includes Rivette’s personal commentary on each of the films, which is complemented by indispensable interviews with those actors, actresses, producers, and scriptwriters associated with the director throughout his career. The text is illustrated with the production stills and photographs taken from the *Cahiers* archives and from the personal collections of those associated with Rivette. Due to the broader scope of her study, Frappat does not provide close readings of individual films, as I do, nor does she confront the complex theoretical issues concerning the role of theater in film, which are central to my discussion of Rivette. In the final section of her study, Frappat does provide both a glossary of terms that serve as keys to his auteurist vision and a feminist reassessment of his work entitled, “La Femme de Trente Ans” (“The Woman of Thirty”), an allusion to the Balzac novel that she claims is central to Rivette’s portrait of women in



his films. Balzac's female figure provides the textual constant within her reading of diverse films; she interweaves mythic, magical, and musical references through his diverse films to fabricate an elaborate textual system and a feminist vision.

In the final two chapters, I also provide a feminist reading that interconnects films as apparently diverse as *Noroît* and *Haut bas fragile* through diverse intertextual associations, such as the resonance of the maternal voice, the representation of the feminine figure in dance, and the theme of feminine friendship. My decision to conclude this project with *Haut bas fragile* was not solely based, however, on the articulation of a feminist vision, but also to demonstrate the shift that occurred in Rivette's work on theatricality in his film between the 1970s and the 1990s. On the surface, the shift between the operatic theatricality of *Noroît* and the theatricality associated with the New York taxi-dance hall in *Haut bas fragile* seems considerable, yet both films use distinct modes of theatricality to invoke the past and instate an aura of remembrance. While Frappat in *Secret Compris* makes a fascinating case for Rivette as a feminist film director, she has no interest in analyzing the different modes of theatricality that inform the films. Yet, curiously, she also notes the shift in perspective that I analyze. Rather than attributing this shift to different modes of theatricality, she instead points to a shift in perception, in time: "Between *Les Filles du Feu* and *Haut bas fragile*, time has begun. No longer the perpetual repetition of a mythic cycle (*Duelle*), nor the damned cycle of revenge (*Noroît*), nor the trotting out of zany recommencements (*Céline et Julie*): time is the path traveled between the origin, which is no longer a secret, and the denouement, which is no longer a terror" (my translation, 220). While Frappat claims that the films produced in separate periods differ in terms of their relation to temporality, her reading

does not account for Rivette's use of theatricality in both the earlier cycle *Les Filles du Feu* and the recent *Haut bas fragile* to express a profoundly nostalgic vision of the past. Frappat's auteurist perspective in *Secret Compris*, which reflects her own uniquely feminist inflection, also represents a continuation of that of *Cahiers*, where numerous interviews with Rivette and articles written by him have been published continuously since the 1950s.

Such French sources—and American critic Jonathan Rosenbaum's *Rivette, Texts and Interviews*, which remains the only serious study on Rivette in English—have definitely shaped my own vision of the director, yet it should be clear that my approach represents a departure from each. This dissertation addresses the stylistic concerns of Rivette's cinema through the prism of theater aesthetics to locate the specificity of his style. Each chapter examines a different aspect of this single aesthetic impulse through an intensive examination of an individual film. My method focuses on citation and intertextuality in an attempt to provide ideological analyses of the films within the social and political context of postwar France, while addressing such issues as reflexivity, realism, dramatic composition, performance, and gendered subjectivity.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup> In a 1968 interview "Le temps déborde" with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Rivette retrospectively criticizes the artificial, theatrical dialogue of *Paris nous appartient*, which he claims also affected the acting: "[...] the style of the dialogues and, consequently, the acting style bothered me enormously. I believed while I was writing them that they were anti-Aurenche and Bost, but now I see that it's the same thing, dialogue for effects, in the worst sense of the word" (15).

CHAPTER 2  
AN INVESTIGATION OF THEATRICALITY:  
POSTWAR PARIS AND *PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT*

I want the audience to see our century from outside,  
as something alien, as a witness. And at the same time  
to participate in it, since it is in fact making this century.  
There is one feature peculiar to our age:  
The fact that we know we shall be judged.

— Jean-Paul Sartre 1959; “The Author, The Play,  
and the Audience”

*From Périclès, prince de Tyr to Paris nous appartient*

Rivette's first feature film *Paris nous appartient/Paris Belongs to Us* (1958-60) is about the production of the Shakespeare play *Périclès, prince de Tyr* by a struggling Paris theater director Gerard Lenz. Rivette later claimed that Shakespeare represented uncharted terrain: “For me Shakespeare remains sort of a myth, about which fundamentally, I know very little. [ . . . ] It is a continent that we know to be gigantic, extraordinary, but that will remain *Terra incognita*” (my translation, Armel 64). Rivette's choice of *Périclès* also was inspired by Léon Ruth's production of the Shakespeare play at *Théâtre de l'Ambigu*.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the 1958 season, theater critics praised his production of Shakespeare's little known play as an ambitious, even daring, project. André Camp's accolade in *l'Avant-Scène: Femina Théâtre* is representative:

I would have heartily congratulated Audiberti for having treated Shakespeare with the characteristic casualness of the creator; even more so Léon Ruth, for having brought such fastidious care and fidelity to his adaptation of *Pericles, prince of Tyr*, a surprising and spirited production

at the *Théâtre de l'Ambigu*. This ancient melodrama is supremely suited to its place on the boulevard du Crime. (my translation, 43-44)<sup>2</sup>

Although widely praised, the play was poorly attended and was closed down in

September of 1958. Philippe Chauveau in *Les Théâtres Parisiens Disparus* provides this account:

What madness! Thirty actors for ninety-five roles, twenty-seven sets by Jacques Noel, and music composed by Gérard Calvi. Critics, unanimously, saluted the effort. The audience, unfortunately, remained slight. It became necessary to change the program. [. . .] On September 28, 1958, Marceau returned, for one year, to replenish the till. (my translation, 55)

Although the popular mime act solved the immediate problem, financial difficulties

continued to plague the theater. Seven years later, on November 1, 1965, it was

announced that the *Théâtre de l'Ambigu* had been sold and would be demolished to make space for the construction of an office building.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, Rivette could not have foreseen

the fate of *l'Ambigu* in 1958, the year that he began filming *Paris nous appartient*; yet the film's plot—an artist's tragic, inevitable capitulation to the forces of capitalist

consumerism—provides an ominous portent of the fate of the theater.

In his first feature, Rivette uses a *fait divers* (an incidental event) for its social and political resonance. In this, he follows in the path of playwrights such as Sartre and filmmakers like Renoir and Rossellini who, as Marc Ferro has pointed out, “have applied this procedure to the past (not only to the present), and they have outpaced historians” (161). Rivette's use of *fait divers* is modeled on Sartre's use of “situation,” the central tenet of his Existentialist drama. As theater historian David Bradby points out, Sartre borrowed the concept of “situation” from Charles Dullin, whose theater school *l'Atelier* shaped an entire generation of artists, including Jean-Louis Barrault, Antonin Artaud,

Jean Vilar, Jean Marais, and many others (5). Sartre was a frequent visitor to Dullin's school during the early years of the Occupation and sharpened his dramaturgical skills by watching rehearsals and listening to Dullin insistently repeat to his actors: "don't perform the words—perform the situations" (my translation, qtd in Bradby 5). Dullin produced Sartre's first major play *Les Mouches* (1943), an allegory that alluded to the Pétain government's collaboration with the Nazis, based on Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. The play demonstrated the importance of "situation" for Sartre, who believed that freedom only becomes meaningful when characters are placed within a "situation" that requires action and choice (Bradby 37). Dullin taught Sartre how to write for the theater; after the war Sartre became one of France's most important dramatists.

Rivette reinvents Sartrean theatricality in *Paris nous appartient*, specifically through the notion of "situation" initially articulated by Dullin. Drawing on the strategies of the situationist theater that Sartre proposed as a safeguard against realistic, psychological theater, Rivette positions the spectator as a witness who encounters a dramatic situation. Rivette frames the "plot" of Shakespeare's *Périclès* in *mise-en-abyme* within the contemporary "plot" of an international cold war conspiracy.<sup>4</sup> In this manner, the film presents the modern world with the force of ancient ritual. The film begins with the mysterious disappearance of a Spanish musician and revolutionary named Juan, who had composed music to accompany theater director Gerard Lenz's production of *Périclès*. Juan's sudden, unexplained disappearance provides a point of intersection between the parallel stories of theatrical production and conspiratorial intrigue, which fan out and unfold as interdependent strands. At the close of the film, the dual "plots" dovetail symmetrically with the discovery of Gerard Lenz's body, another bizarre murder that

echoes Juan's at the film's opening. Rivette uses the myth of the theater in *Paris nous appartient* to regenerate French cinema.

### From Shakespeare to Sartrean Situationist Theater

Sartre's situationist theater forged modern myths to renew French theater during the Occupation. He claimed that "Its greatness derives from its social and in a certain sense, religious functions: it must remain a rite" ("Myths" 41). Sartre advocated the establishment of distance between spectator and actor through ritual, which he felt would safeguard situationist theater against the dangers of a degenerate bourgeois dramatic theater ("Epic" 120). Yet, he did not endorse the pedagogical epic theater of Brecht, which he felt was subject to the mistaken belief that "you can present society as an object to the audience" ("Epic" 120). In his critique of Brechtian theater, Sartre astutely observed: "any demystification must be in a sense mystifying" ("People's Theater" 53). He felt that the critical response of spectators steeped in mystification could not be trusted, and so, his theater would provide a countermystification ("People's Theater" 53). Consequently, the actor in the situationist theater would seek to mesmerize or bewitch the audience, rather than show or demonstrate as a Brechtian actor would (Bradby 45). The situationist theater was to serve, in some sense, as a mediatory ground between the two forms of drama and thus would neither entirely dispense with spectator participation nor indulge in the sympathetic extremes to which bourgeois dramatic theater was prone ("Epic" 120).

Throughout his dramatic *oeuvre*, Sartre attempted to forge modern myths in which individuals found themselves in intolerable situations and consequently, were forced to choose between action or acquiescence to their fate. Modern myth was at the

heart of Sartrean theatrical ritual, which he affirms in “Interview with Kenneth Tynan”:

“At bottom, I am always looking for myths; in other words, for subjects so sublimated that they are recognizable to everyone, without recourse to minute psychological details” (“Tynan” 132). In Sartre’s view, the theater must transmute contemporary social and political events into mythic form (“Tynan” 127). *Paris nous appartient* recalls the situationist theater in precisely this respect. Sartre’s landmark article “Pour un théâtre de situations” appeared in the November 1947 issue of *La Rue* in which he defined the theater of situation in opposition to a theater of character:

But if it’s true that man is free in a given situation and that in and through that situation he chooses what he will be, then what we have to show in the theater are simple and human situations and free individuals in these situations choosing what they will be. The character comes later, after the curtain has fallen. It is only the hardening of choice, its arterio-sclerosis; it is what Kierkegaard called *repetition*. (“Situations” 4)

The situationist theater conformed precisely to the pattern of classical tragedy, and this, Bradby argues, places Sartre definitively on the side of the ancients, rather than the moderns (46). Rivette envisioned cinema as Sartre saw the theatre—as an ancient rite. Yet his film implicitly renders the terms of the debate problematic, offering to redefine modernism as an insistence on the ancient. Rivette explains:

The interest of film lies in its incessant confrontation with a world that obeys rites—as in the theater—and of its true potential that is released through opposing these rites, a force that bursts apart yet remains vaulted shut in tragedy and in death. (my translation, qtd. in Collet 66)

Rivette’s cinema resembles Sartre’s situationist theater insofar as both offer a countermystification—a rite in response to a world entranced by rites. Cinematic ritual can be distinguished from that of theater, according to Sartre, in terms of repetition: The theatrical performance itself is a non-repeatable act, whereas cinema is characterized

precisely by its capacity for endless repetition ("Myth" 140). Sartre explains: "The comparable thing in music would be the contrast between the jam session and the jazz record" ("Myth" 140). Constructed around the principle of repetition/rehearsal ("*répétition*"), *Paris nous appartient* reinvents the myth of the theater.

### Postwar Crisis: Between Brecht and Cultic Theatricality

We first encounter *Périclès* through the eyes of a young provincial student Anne Goupil, who accompanies her friend Jean Marc to the theater set where director Gerard Lenz is rehearsing. Lenz's production is in trouble, yet he chooses to continue to produce *Périclès* against all odds, even when he must acknowledge the impossibility of a successful outcome. Lenz remarks to Jean Marc, "It's five to one we'll flop." Due to financial difficulties, Lenz is losing not only his actors who are abandoning him for more lucrative media productions in television and film, but his rehearsal hall as well. Lenz, however, declares his determination to produce art regardless of the risks involved. The story of Gerard Lenz and his recruitment of Anne Goupil for his Shakespeare production draw on the subcultural, communal student ethos of the Théâtre National Populaire of the 1950s. According to Bradby, students and young people strongly identified with the social mission of the T.N.P. (94). Conversely, the T.N.P., as Marie-Thérèse Serrière observes in *Le T.N.P. et nous*, was especially attuned to the student population:

In a word, the T.N.P. is a young theater and thus, is devoted to the conquest of the young. The youthful worker and the young student constitute a public that is less blasé, less habituated to other pastimes, an essentially generous public, who will comprise the surest foundation for the creation of a future constituency. (my translation, 182)

The audience of the T.N.P. in the 1950s, as Bradby explains, was moved not just by the drama, but by the troupe's conviction that the theater had a social mission to fulfill (94).



Under the directorate of Jean Vilar, the theater of the Chaillot palace that housed the T.N.P. was transformed into an open, classless space, where all were free to share common human concerns (Bradby 93).<sup>5</sup> Vilar's repertoire reflected the tradition of the Elizabethans and the Ancient Greeks, for whom theater represented an open forum for the



Figure 2.1. Gerard Lenz at the theater, *Paris nous appartient*. Collection BIFI, Paris.

public debate of civic concerns (Bradby 93). *Paris nous appartient*'s focus on Shakespeare and the powerful appeal of the Bard to both Gerard's troupe and to the young student Anne clearly reflect the spirit of the T.N.P. cultivated by Vilar; yet *Paris nous appartient* simultaneously predicts the end of this era. The film shows that, by the end of the decade, young people were either discarding the postwar dream of a popular

theater to secure more lucrative positions in new media technologies—or were, like director Gerard Lenz, being co-opted by capitalist speculators.

The staging of Shakespeare in *Paris nous appartient* provided Rivette with the opportunity to explore the interrelationship between theater and cinema.<sup>6</sup> In a 1996 interview with Aliette Armel “Autour du Cinema,” Rivette reflects on the profound tie between the theater and the cinema:

First, theater is the fundamental subject matter of the cinema. [. . .] Theatrical space, is, for me, the primary scene, the unconscious of the cinema. [. . .] Even when the theater is not present in an apparent way, it appears in an almost involuntary manner. (my translation, 62)

The scene in which Anne rehearses her role from *Périclès* playfully cultivates the interchange between theater and cinema. As the rehearsal recommences, Anne agrees to shift her position from a witness in the audience to a participant in the play. Lenz casts Anne in the role of Marina, the child in *Périclès* who becomes the unwitting object of a murderous conspiracy. The theatrical role of Marina rhymes with Anne’s cinematic script in which she also plays the role of the unwitting gamine, who stumbles onto an international conspiracy that is unfolding around her. This duplication of theatrical and cinematic scripting is paralleled by the scene’s formal elements. As Anne repeats her lines from *Périclès*, “Is this wind westerly that blows [. . .],” a prop man stands at her side with a blowing fan that is used to simulate sea breeze. Obviously, the fan would be used to create the effect of realism at the cinema, but in this scene, its ungainly appearance on the stage foregrounds theatrical artifice. This scene holds up theatrical and cinematic conventions to the light, permitting the spectator to reflect on profilmic representation as an artificial construct. The scene betrays the influence of Brecht in its

playful attempt to expose the conventions and codes of cinema. Here, Rivette models the scene on the Brechtian stage that Roland Barthes lucidly describes in an essay of 1956:

For what Brechtian dramaturgy postulates is that today at least, the responsibility of a dramatic art is not so much to express reality as to signify it. Hence there must be a certain distance between signified and signifier: revolutionary art must admit a certain arbitrary nature of signs, it must acknowledge a certain "formalism," in the sense that it must treat form according to an appropriate method, which is the semiological method. [ . . . ] Brecht's formalism is a radical protest against the confusions of the bourgeois and *petit-bourgeois* false Nature: in a still-alienated society, art must be critical, it must cut off all illusions, even that of "Nature": the sign must be partially arbitrary, otherwise we fall back on an art of expression, an art of essentialist illusion. (*Essays* 74-5)

Although the profilmic scene from *Paris nous appartient* reproduces the provisional quality of the Brechtian stage, it does not offer the spectator a demystification of the socio-political event in the manner of Brechtian theater.

Brechtian theatricality began to surface in the realm of cinematic representation at the time that Rivette was filming *Paris nous appartient*. Rivette's comments in 1962 clearly indicate his early interest in Brechtian dramaturgy and, as George Lellis notes, his awareness of a precedent for Brecht in traditional French Enlightenment culture: "I'd like to follow the example of Brecht: *Paris nous appartient* would be *Drums in the Night*; and the trilogy I'm planning set in the eighteenth century, more or less an adaptation of *Edward II*" (qtd. in Lellis 36). The attitudes of film theorists and filmmakers towards Brecht clearly evolved during the 1960s in the context of an ongoing theoretical debate, which centered on how Brecht's theories of theater could be translated to cinema. Among the most important defenders of Brecht in France was Bernard Dort, who in his article for the special Brecht issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1960, points to the

profound impact of Brecht on French intellectual thought, and specifically on the film criticism produced at *Cahiers*:

It can be seen that enthusiasm for Brecht has now reached cinema circles. I do not know if the producers have been affected [ . . . ] but the critics now refer to Brecht, and sometimes invoke his name, and they have begun airing their Brechtian jargon. *Positif* has been thoroughly infected and *Cahiers du Cinéma* will be shortly, for Louis Marcorelles has been doggedly undermining its defenses for a number of years. Eric Rohmer casually referred to Brecht in its pages last October and this was an unmistakable sign that a Brecht epidemic was about to break out at *Cahiers*. Indeed, it may be triggered by the present issue. As a result, we may even catch the defenders of cinematic specificity boning up on 'A Short Organum for the Theatre' or the 'Hitchcocko-Hawksiens' professing their faith in the Berliner Ensemble. (236)

Certain aspects of Brechtian philosophical thought and its corresponding strategies provided *Cahiers* critics with an innovative approach to questions of form in film in the 1960s. Central to the debate surrounding the translation of Brechtian dramatic form to cinema was the Brechtian strategy of *Verfremdung*, which is translated as "distanciation," "estrangement," or "alienation," and is counterposed to the identification of the spectator with the work and with characters in traditional theater (Brecht 91-100). Brecht distinguishes his epic theater from the Aristotelian dramatic theater and its reliance on the psychological effects of empathy and emotional catharsis (78). He refers to his dramaturgy as a theory of non-Aristotelian drama, where reason is the decisive factor, rather than emotion (79). Key to the non-Aristotelian epic drama is the notion of the social *geste*, which Brecht defines as the "gestural expression of the social relationships prevailing between people" (139). Brechtian dramaturgy forced the viewer to participate in a rational analysis of social conflict.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Alexander Kluge, Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet are generally regarded as the filmmakers most influenced by

Brecht.<sup>7</sup> These directors attempt to translate Brechtian strategies into cinematic form, using an anti-illusionistic style of presentation. Godard's *Vivre sa vie/My Life to Live* (1962) is modeled on Brechtian epic theater; it announces its episodic structure, "a film in 12 tableaux." This epic film replaces the conventional suspense story and its Aristotelian dramatic structure with a didactic presentation, using consecutive tableaux patterned as a "learning-play" (Brecht 79). Written intertitles simulate the effect of marginal footnotes, which call attention to image-sound relations, producing a "radical separation of the elements" (Brecht 44, 37-38). Brechtian filmmakers adapt this process of "literarization," which Brecht describes as "punctuating representation with formulation," to destroy the aesthetic illusion (43-47).<sup>8</sup> The intent of the epic film remains identical to that of the epic theater, which Brecht claims is "to develop the means of pleasure into an object of instruction, and to convert certain institutions from places of entertainment into organs of mass communication" (42). Leftist critics and filmmakers like Godard conceived of Brechtian cinema as a countermeasure to the classical Hollywood cinema's unreflective appropriation of Renaissance Quattrocento perspective and its inherent idealist ideology. They condemned classical Hollywood style for its unwitting attempt to perfect the Aristotelian notion of imitation (*mimesis*) (Aristotle 116-18) at the basis of the Renaissance theater and additionally, to preserve this illusion of homogeneity and continuity through its use of invisible editing.<sup>9</sup> Leftist critics endorsed the epic film that foregrounded those cinematic codes calculated to reproduce the "impression" of reality, specifically through Brechtian strategies that emphasized theatricality at the expense of imitation.

The emergence of Brechtian theatricality was symptomatic of a postwar crisis in the realm of representation. It was precipitated by the arrival of television in the 1950s, which was accompanied by the surfeit of high capitalist Hollywood spectacle. Youssef Ishaghpour associates the contemporary crisis with the world-historical “decline of the aura,” which Walter Benjamin in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” has attributed to the increased intervention of technical means in the production and reception of art in the twentieth century (222). In this essay, Benjamin defines the aura as the uniqueness of the work of art, which is inseparable from its ritual or cultic function in the community (223). This cultic function refers to the dependent status of works of art, which are “embedded in the fabric of tradition,” thereby owing their existence to their role in rituals of social formation, such as the death mask in ancient magic rites or the medieval Christian painting (Benjamin 223). As the object of religious adoration, the work of art acquired a sacrosanct character; its aura testified to its singular position in time and space. The ritual basis of artistic production is later replaced, however, by the “secular cult of beauty” developed during the Renaissance, precipitating an early crisis in representation (Benjamin 224). The work of art’s ongoing struggle for autonomy continues for three centuries and culminates in the nineteenth-century doctrine of *l’art pour l’art*, a self-contained aestheticism that Benjamin describes as a “theology of art” (224). The hermetic doctrine of *l’art pour l’art* promises a restoration of the aura, though within the framework of aesthetic autonomy, as a form of “secularized ritual” (Benjamin 224). As Richard Wolin observes, *l’art pour l’art* originated as romanticism’s response to the widespread commodification of art and spirit, which occurred under nineteenth-century capitalism (188). *L’art pour l’art* protested the

reintegration of art into the mundane world of utilitarian consumerism by attempting to suppress all evidence of its relation to social life (Wolin 188).

With the advent of photographic reproduction, every work of art became replaceable. With a plurality of copies suddenly available *en masse*, the originality and authenticity of the work became an irrelevance, resulting in the decay of the aura. Mechanical reproduction effectively shattered the singularity in time and space on which the work of art depended for its claim to authority. Benjamin affirms that “[technical reproduction] enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record. The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in the auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room” (221). This process of mechanical reproduction represented a qualitative shift in the definition of art such that its status as an object of aesthetic pleasure assumed a role subordinate to its function as a utilitarian means of communication, paving the way for the political function of art. As Wolin has observed, the focus of attention shifted from the work of art itself as a privileged entity to the point of intersection between work and onlooker (188).

During the first half of the twentieth century, film assumed a preeminent role in the decline of the aura, due to its enhanced exhibition value. For Benjamin, film seemed ideally suited for the propagation of political content, due to its assault on the private and solitary conditions for the production and reception of bourgeois autonomous art. Yet Benjamin’s projections for film as the future form of political art were derailed during the postwar period. The predominance of high capitalist Hollywood spectacle, coupled with the increased intervention of technical means in the transmission of televised broadcasts,

entailed an accelerated loss of meaning and the reduction of image information to the ephemeral. The theatrical tendency characteristic of cinematographic modernity emerged in response to what Guy Debord terms this “banalizing trend” (38). It assumed two separate forms: Brechtian versus cultic theatricality. The Brechtian tendency reflected the decline of the aura, whereas the theatrical tendency of Rivette’s cinema promised a restoration of aura through recourse to a secularized ritual.

### Sartrean Countermystification

As *Paris nous appartient* opens, we watch from the window of a train as it moves through the bleak *banlieue* (suburbs) to approach a Paris station. In sharp contrast to the lack of visual drama within these opening images, orchestral accompaniment points to a dramatic potential. The scene positions the spectator to identify with the point of view of a tourist arriving from beyond the borders of the city, a refugee seeking the city as a safe haven, or a Parisian native returning home. The point of view remains unsourced; the film opens with an enigma. Rivette reflects in 1959:

To the extent that there is mystery at the heart of the cinema (as there is mystery at the center of everything, in general, and of all the arts, in particular), [ . . . ] I believe that the mystery at the heart of cinema is, to use the expression of André Bazin, ontological: in the cinema, there is a process through which one can apprehend reality that, on the one hand, will only be able to apprehend appearances, but that, on the other hand, through appearances, can also apprehend an interiority. (my translation, qtd. in Collet 57-8)

In order to formulate a cinema of “mystery,” Rivette adopts Bazinian terminology. As Dudley Andrew has noted, André Bazin’s conceptualization of an ontological realism was based on Sartre’s *Psychology of the Imagination* (106). The “mystery” at the heart of Rivettian cinema becomes a quality of the world itself when we attribute to Rivette the existentialist ideas of Sartre (Andrew, *Bazin* 106). For existentialists such as Sartre,



Mounier, and Merleau-Ponty, reality perpetually unfolds: the mind participates in its experience (Andrew, *Bazin* 106). Thus, mystery is the quintessential attribute of the real and a value attained when consciousness sensitively confronts the world (Andrew, *Bazin* 106).

After the film's enigmatic opening scene, the camera cranes across Paris rooftops and moves smoothly into the window of a *chambre de bonne* (maid's room). A voice motivates a sudden, swift movement downwards to reveal the student Anne Goupil reciting in English Ariel's song from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, "But doth suffer a sea-change/ Into something rich and strange/ Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:/ Hark! now I hear them, - Ding-dong, bell" (*Tempest* 1140). Our entry into the room, like Ariel's entry, is motivated by sound, and thus, we are situated as eavesdroppers. Laplanche and Pontalis have determined that, "[...]the overheard, when it interrupts, fractures the continuity of an undifferentiated perceptual field and at the same time signifies (as a noise waited for and perceived in the night), calling forth and positioning the subject" (50-1). The spectator resembles the audial child with its voyeuristic and epistemophilic drives who is both awakened and called forth as a subject (Rodowick 101).<sup>10</sup>

Situated as eavesdroppers on the scene before us, our position is echoed in Anne's as she overhears a woman crying. The persistent sound from the next room intrudes upon the diegetic space of the scene, motivating Anne to rise to investigate its source. In the neighboring room, Anne encounters a mysterious Spanish woman who leaks news of a conspiracy, "He's been murdered. It's not possible otherwise. First Assunta, then Juan. It's just beginning, all his friends, they'll all be killed. It's not just Pierre nor you nor I. Everything's in danger. The whole world." At the moment of revelation, Anne becomes

privity to “insider” knowledge of an international conspiracy, as do we who overhear the conversation. In the following scene, Anne has a rendezvous with her half-brother Pierre at a sidewalk café. In response to Pierre’s query, Anne’s exasperated exclamation of “je n’en peux plus” (I can’t bear it anymore) echoes the Spaniard’s response to Anne’s inquiry in the previous scene. Anne’s repetition of the Spanish woman’s line and the posture she assumes, “Je n’ai plus de courage” (I no longer have the courage) points to the identification of the women with each other. Moreover, the meaning of the phrase becomes reflexive within the context of the café conversation, signifying not only Anne’s inability to repeat her scholastic “script” but as a self-conscious pointing to the character Anne’s repetition of the scripted line of another character. Pierre takes up Anne’s role of eavesdropper, asking her what her Spanish neighbor had said, to which Anne paradoxically replies, “Nothing I can repeat.” Reasserting her identification with the Spaniard, Anne adds, “It didn’t make any sense. I think she’s crazy, like me.” The café scene closes with a final repetition and intertextual citation. As they leave the café, Pierre’s partner Ida remarks, “let’s not waste time,” which becomes a line Anne repeats and rephrases as a Proustian citation “*Et le temps perdu, on ne le retrouve jamais*” (And lost time, one never retrieves it).

Eavesdropping produces the resonance of an echo chamber in which signifiers migrate and change meaning. Within the opening scenes of the film, Anne eavesdrops and in this manner, learns of a conspiracy. While Anne is positioned by the film as a witness, an outsider who will persistently seek to pin down the meaning behind the mystery, she is simultaneously situated as a participant, an insider whose discourse repeats, without her knowledge or control, partial phrases that the Spaniard reveals.

While the character Anne points to her own paranoiac disposition, “I think she’s crazy like me,” the uncanniness of the situation is set in place by a structure of repetition that is not recuperable as an aspect of character psychology. The resonant effect of an echo chamber that is produced by the reflexivity of the film’s dialogue as well as by its intertextual references places the spectator simultaneously in the position of a participant who identifies with character psychology and a witness, who is forced to reflect on the character as a fictional construct within a dramatic situation. The film demands a ceremonial participation conforming to the form of drama that Sartre had defined as a rite.

### **Retaking Paris: A Shifting Historical Referent**

Formally repeating our introduction to Anne Goupil, Rivette once again uses a crane shot to capture her poised by a window; this time, it is night in a painter’s atelier. Like Anne, we again participate as eavesdroppers on a scene in which we are made privy to the ambiguous circumstances surrounding Juan’s death. His portrait, which has already been sold and which we never see, is replaced in the scene by the painter’s blank canvas. The vast white canvas serves as the structuring absence of the scene; it stands in for the portrait of the Spanish anarchist. The phantom quality of Juan would seem to point towards what historian Louis Stein in *Beyond Death and Exile* has termed the “shadow war,” the specter of the Spanish Civil War that appeared sporadically up until the point of Franco’s death (223). According to Stein, much of this clandestine struggle left no documentation as most of the records of guerrilla fighters, as well as those of local and regional committees, were seized by the authorities and impounded or destroyed (223). Guerrilla leader Juan Molina’s personal and extensive collection of clandestine

periodicals, manifestoes, reports of guerrillas on their experiences after entering Spain from France, official directives of the national committee of the anarchist movement in Spain were inexplicably stolen (Stein 224). Invaluable documents were irretrievably lost. The painter's blank canvas serves as the center of gravity of the scene and the film itself, pointing not only to the absence of the character Juan but also to the absence of an accurate historical portrait of the period he represents.

Juan's story is based on myth, the figure of the republican guerrilla cloaked in an aura of mystery. The frustrated painter whose task has been to penetrate surface appearances in order to portray his model's essence gesticulates angrily "Fictions! Mysteries!" in response to José, the Spanish guitarist who questions "the truth" of Juan's identity. The guitarist plays a melancholic refrain, a hollow echo of Juan's taped "Music of the Apocalypse." He calls attention to his own imitative refrain unapologetically with the remark "It's all that's left." Minna compares Juan to Spanish poet and dramaturge Garcia Lorca, whose verses such as *Cancion del jinete* (Song of the Horseman) drew inspiration from the lyricism of popular Andalusian songs. Others at the *soirée* suggest that Juan, like Lorca, might have faced a fascist firing squad had he lived. Juan becomes a nostalgic reference standing for the portrait of the political artist tragically doomed by a situation of crisis. Stein suggests that it was, "the image of the lonely, isolated groups of Spanish Maquis prowling the Guadarrama or Pyrenees mountains, descending swiftly and silently to attack a Guardia Civil post and then retreating just as silently, quickly, into their mountain fastness [. . .]" that captured the popular imagination (224). This romantic figure belonged to the landscapes of Goya, according to Stein, and was tied to a proud Spanish tradition of irreverent fighters of the past (224). Even when the republican

guerrillas realized the impossibility of a final victory against the Francoist Falange, some heroically persisted in the struggle through the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>11</sup> Stein attempts to account for the mythic force that the guerrilla figure generated within the minds of the mass populus:

Were they the Don Quixotes of the twentieth century, immersed in a fantastic dream and wearing tattered rags for armor? Were they simply zealots and revolutionaries who didn't know when to acknowledge defeat? Or were they heroes, anonymous idealists whose exploits, told and retold in the villages, would keep hope alive? (228)

While the absence of Juan's portrait implicitly poses questions destined to remain unanswered, his possible suicide presents the disturbing image of a final retreat into the depths of despair.

In *Paris nous appartient*, the mythic force of the Spanish warrior Juan overlaps with that of the Existentialist hero. As Norma Upchurch points out, Sartre's view of character is tied to a situation of crisis that requires sacrifice, adding that Sartre favored extreme initial situations, opening his plays with crisis (39, 42). Sartre's early work *Les Mains Sales* (1948), which deals with questions of collaboration and personal culpability, is an intertextual frame that informs *Paris nous appartient*; the drama, like the film, opens with the characters' speculations surrounding a political murder and closes with the suicide of its Existentialist hero Hugo. Similar to *Paris nous appartient*, Sartre's later drama *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (1959) examines the connections between modern history, capitalist expansionism, and violence through its depiction of the sequestration and suicide of a Nazi torturer named Frantz and his collaborationist bourgeois father. Theater historian Jacques Guicharnaud calls death the Sartrean situation par excellence, and more precisely, it is the question of whether to kill or be killed that defines the

Existential option (qtd. in Upchurch 40). Here, Upchurch's description of the Sartrean hero within the situation of crisis bears obvious resemblance to the myth of the Spanish revolutionary:

He [the existentialist hero] will find himself alone and anguished by the necessity of choosing, yet insofar as he is willing, nevertheless, to force himself to the limit, to take risks no matter what the cost, and then in turn to accept complete responsibility for his actions, he attests to man's potential for full self-realization and greatness. (43)

The portrait of the Existentialist hero intersects with that of the republican warrior for both are viewed as solitary figures on the socio-historical landscape, who are forced by a crisis situation to choose and to accept the risks involved. Exiled Spanish guerrilla Ramon Capdevila, who was ultimately murdered by Francoist forces, speaks of the choice he faced following the victory of Allied forces:

Today or tomorrow, I know already that I must fall. Struggles like ours need victims. And one can never think of saving his life. If one survives it is good luck. If one falls, then it is a debt already paid. Until now death has respected me. If it comes, here or there, what more can be given? . . . I see him stand before me. [He is] the spirit and the symbol of invincible and indestructible Spain, of the new Spain, the eternal, the perennial, that of yesterday and of tomorrow, which all of Franco's guns, all of Franco's schools, all of Franco's work of material and moral destruction, will never be able to annihilate. (qtd. in Stein 222)

The myth of the republican guerrilla, modeled on such figures as Capdevila, and the myth of the Existentialist hero combine in the film. The absent portrait of Juan in the *atelier* provides space for the elaboration of a new myth that reinvents Spanish mythopoesis. The serious tone of the company at the *soirée* is reflected in the reasons they cite for his death: the nihilism of Spanish exiles who had given up the struggle, the stagnant Paris climate, the secretive machinations of Terry the American *femme fatale* who embodies the seductive allure of western capitalism.

The guests at the *soirée* are eavesdroppers, witnesses to an abject and mysterious scene that will have traumatic resonance. Juan's death echoes Lorca's, which in turn echoes that of Vladimir Mayakovsky—the celebrated poet of the Bolshevik Revolution. Like the spectator, the guests eavesdrop to pin down details; yet they are simultaneously situated as participants and collaborators in the mysterious circumstances surrounding Juan's death and implicate each other by turn.<sup>12</sup> The guilty paranoia of the guests augments the uncanny effect already formally present in the film's opening scenes. On the surface, the film's title "Paris nous appartient" implies plenitude and possession, while providing an ironic evocation of the sense of loss and exile central to the *atelier* scene and to the film. The title offers a shifting historical referent, at once retaking Paris from the collaborationist Vichy government, but more directly Francoist Spain. Indeed, the film's obsessive focus on the mythic figure of the republican warrior might be read as the expression of a national trauma: the guilt and shame that is experienced after the fact for the collaborationist role that France played under Pétain and then continued to play in the fascist consolidation of power in Spain after World War II.

### From boulevard du Crime to Balzac

Following the theater troupe's rehearsal of *Périclès*, the American Terry arrives with Philip Kaufman, a "paranoiac" and political refugee from the States fleeing the climate of McCarthyism. Terry describes Philip as "a little crazy," an observation that echoes Anne's earlier remark to Pierre, in which she had characterized the enigmatic Spanish tenant as "crazy like me." "Craziness" serves as the signifier for an infectious "insider" knowledge that spreads through Paris, a discursive disease that is read here as synonymous with the conspiracy itself. As Philip and Anne nonchalantly stroll together

down a shady boulevard, Philip confides to her his knowledge of a conspiracy. A symmetrical tableau shot of city space, offset by the fluttering motion of pigeons dispersing *en masse*, provides a measured pause in which the spectator may reflect on the singularity of this isolated moment within the historical movement of the city itself.

The film's opening title "summer of 1957" sets the Paris criminal conspiracy within a contemporary time frame. Historically, as Richard Burton shows in "The Unseen Seer, or Proteus in the City," the obsession with crime, criminals, and criminal conspiracies began in the early 1840s when a collective paranoia captivated Parisians of all classes (51). Burton finds that such publications as the *Gazette des Tribunaux* and *Les Mystères de Paris* amplified this "grand peur" (1840), until all sections of the city's population readily subscribed to the notion that Paris was in the wake of a vast criminal conspiracy aimed not just at persons but also at the very structure of society itself (51). According to Burton, the mythopoeic urban imagination fused "classes dangereuses" and "classes laborieuses" into a single menacing entity (51). With its clandestine forms of communication, its private language, and its web-like organization, the underworld was seen as a counter-society intent on undermining and seizing control of orthodox society (Burton 51). These subterranean "classes dangereuses" were envisioned as Barbarian hordes infiltrating the citadel of the established social and political order (Burton 51).

The collective paranoia that had spread through Paris towards the end of the Bourgeois Monarchy was symptomatic, according to Burton, of a "moral panic" and mass identity crisis brought about by the revolutionary transformation of Parisian life:

[. . .] the massive process of modernization, operating simultaneously and inseparably in the fields of politics, economy, social structure, institutions, ideology and what Foucault calls the underlying *episteme* of the age which, between say, 1780 and 1860, transformed France from a quasi-



feudal monarchy into a fully capitalist democracy and, as an integral part of that process, made of the introverted, labyrinthine, highly personalized and humanly differentiated Paris of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the vast homogenized metropolis of the Second Empire whose radiating boulevards, uninterrupted vistas and extroverted structure represent a triumph of the principles of Panopticism in the field of city planning. (66)

This myth of the criminal conspiracy returns in *Paris nous appartient*. Rivette's film transforms collective paranoia from the insidious threat posed by an underworld of "classes dangereuses" and "classes laborieuses" to the panoptic eye of Protean rulers, whose omniscient perspective seems to hover ominously over the city. A disorienting cut from the timeless, static Paris tableau to the harsh glare of car headlights approaching, the screech of brakes, and a woman's scream marks their advance, while a close-up of a dead body lying on the pavement serves as a condensation of the past and the present.<sup>13</sup>

Wandering through the crowded Paris shopping district, the paranoiac Philip remarks to Anne, "Another one!" This remark recalls the previous scene and attributes the victim's "accidental" death to the collusion of invisible forces that were responsible for Juan's death. Conspiracy here serves as oblique, symbolic reference to the network of American, British, and French nation states that had "accidentally" abandoned the revolutionary cause of Spanish republicans in the service of western capitalist consolidation. Yet, Philip's remark can also be interpreted as reflexive, underscoring the film's intertextual reference to the American film noir *Kiss Me Deadly*, whose conspiracy story resonates within Rivette's film. Philip is situated as an eyewitness on the Paris boulevard to a conspiracy that is unfolding everywhere around him and is consequently subject to the infiltration of a new class of invisible rulers. Rushing from the crowd past department store windows, Philip remarks to Anne, "The real masters are hidden and

govern in secret. They have no names," a comment inflected with the paranoid certainty of being controlled by social, political, and economic forces that are no longer visible or identifiable.

The myth of the Parisian criminal can be traced to the mid-nineteenth century, when crime tended to involve deception and cunning rather than brute force (Burton 52). The criminal comes to be seen as a man without a self, according to Burton, "a *vêtement sans corps*," whose "negative capability" permits him to feign a multiplicity of selves, to pass insidiously from one identity to another (52). The criminal as actor is detailed in Balzac's *Code des gens honnêtes* (1830):

Above all, the thief must know men, their character and their passions [. . .]; he must possess a brilliantly conceived plan, be a good actor and a good mime, so that he can imitate the tone and manners of men from diverse social classes; he must mimic the store clerk, the banker, the general, know their habits, and when needs be, slip into the police chief's uniform or wear the cop's badge. [. . .] Shouldn't he have access to endless resources? Because if someone should blow the whistle on him, it would mean a trip to the gallows. (my translation, 16)

It is in Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* that the myth of the criminal conspiracy is developed most completely (Burton 52). Although the character Jacques Collin remains invisible, he possesses omniscient powers of observation and deduction:

Jacques Collin [. . .] examined everyone that passed before him [. . .]. He watched all the passersby and scrutinized them. Even God would not have possessed a greater understanding of his creation than this man, who could perceive miniscule differences within the undifferentiated mass of people and things. (my translation, qtd. in Burton 52)

As Burton points out, the nineteenth century actor-criminal assumes a multiplicity of Protean guises and "offers a first instance of what will be shown to be a recurring leitmotiv of [. . .] the Parisian imagination: the *deus absconditus* whose hidden hand controls the destinies of men and women from afar" (53). A parallel can thus be drawn

between the criminal and the dramaturge, insofar as both project themselves into “characters” whose seemingly individuated actions they in fact control (Burton 53). In *Paris nous appartient*, conspiratorial plots and plotting become the common pursuit of criminal, dramaturge, and filmmaker alike. In this sense, Philip’s paranoid remark, “The real masters are hidden and govern in secret. They have no names.” must be read not only as an admission of his own participatory role in the “plot” scripted by Rivette, but as symptomatic of a postwar trauma producing collective panic.

*Paris nous appartient* changes the meaning of mystery for here “mystery” becomes associated not simply with a conspiracy plot but with the city itself, transformed into “ce sphinx qu’on appelle Paris” (“that sphinx called Paris”) that Alfred Delvau describes in *Les Dessous de Paris* (1862) (my translation, 9). As Philip discovers a dark walkway, he confides to Anne: “The world is not as it seems. What seems true is only an appearance. I seem to speak in riddles, but some things can be told only in riddles.” Like the *flâneur* of the mid-nineteenth century, Philip stands apart as the privileged witness who claims to decipher the hieroglyphic and arcane signs of an urban landscape, commenting, “What I’m saying, some have guessed. But I KNOW it.” As Burton points out, “The rapture of the *flâneur* [ . . . ] is a rapture of understanding which becomes a kind of preternatural illumination based on the interpenetration of knower and known, a privileged state of being in which [ . . . ] the cognitive element remains paramount” (59). Yet, as Philip’s observations reenact the rapture of the *flâneur*, a chorus of women’s voices filters into his conversation with Anne, recirculating Ariel and the sea-nymphs’ song from *The Tempest*. At this moment, Philip is recast within Anne’s theatrical script from the film’s opening scene. The unmotivated intervention of this song, which remains

illegible and indecipherable to Philip, places him as an unwitting participant in, rather than an informed witness to, the mysteries that the sphinx-like city holds.

*Flânerie* finds its historical echo in Philip's autoscopic nightmare of self-replication, his production and reproduction of a series of self-portraits that adorn his hotel wall. Finally unable to decipher the signs of the city before him, Philip is found



Figure 2.2. Philip in his hotel room, *Paris nous appartient*.

incapacitated on his hotel room floor. Haunted by memories of the Paris boulevards, he remains destined to perpetually clone images of himself. Philip sees himself as a “vêtement sans corps” (“a cloak without a body”), a Proteus whose lack of self-individuation leads him to obsessively identify with the imagined being of others, “I cling to people I meet, you or anyone. I look at them. They exist.” Like the character Jacques Collin of Balzac’s *Splendeurs et misères*, Philip remains an invisible witness to those he

observes, possessing omniscient powers of observation over inhabitants of the hotel that serves as a microcosm of the city. He instructs Anne to, "Look at people who pass. They live in the real world," while consecutive images of hotel occupants illustrate his activity of observing and recording: "Finnish, 18 years old. Ambition, happiness. Works as a model, hopes for better." Like the Protean criminal, Philip's "negative capability" will paradoxically deprive him of the possibility of entering into relationships with these other selves and will instead condemn him to the solitude of self-replication. The hotel inhabitants he observes are themselves simultaneously engaged in an identical process of self-dilation. When Anne later enters the Finnish model's room, extreme close-ups of the portfolio photographs lining her wall offer a dizzying spectacle of self-replication, her identity transformed into dilated images of body parts. The proteanization of Paris life is produced and reproduced ad infinitum in *Paris nous appartient*, where the principle of character identity collapses into an endless echo of the criminal self.

In his capacity to project himself into his "characters" and in his desire to move from the analysis of particulars to a synthetic knowledge of the whole, the dramaturge Gerard Lenz participates in the same epistemological universe as the Protean criminal (Burton 59). Gerard displays to Anne his knowledge of the synthetic structure of *Périclès*, explaining that, "it's made up of rags and pastiches, but it hangs together on another plane, from a global point of view." The director offers Anne the part of Marina, as they converse on pont des Arts overlooking *île de la Cité*, a district historically associated with the criminal underclass (Burton 53). Strolling leisurely across this bridge, Gerard urges Anne once again to take the part in his play. The scene provides a formal repetition of the earlier scene in which Philip, crossing the identical bridge, urges

Anne to play the part of criminal investigator in the conspiracy that threatens Gerard: "You could do something, if you wanted to try to save Gerard." Philip attempts to cast Anne in the role of criminal investigator; in parallel fashion, Gerard will attempt to cast her as the gamine Marina, the unwitting object of a conspiracy. Louis Moreau-



Figure 2.3. Gerard and Anne, *Paris nous appartient*. Collection BIFI, Paris.

Christophe in *Le Monde des coquins* (1863) writes of the nature of the criminal conspiracy that is recirculated in *Paris nous appartient*:

Still today, in France, an association of rogues forms a kind of brotherhood, a guild, a family pact,—*the family of the damned*,—whose members are united through unbreakable ties of criminal solidarity. (my translation and italics, qtd. in Burton 53)

The film scripts the spectator in the same manner that Anne is cast in Gerard and Philip's scenario, seducing us into a "*confrérie*" ("brotherhood") of participatory identification with a "*famille de damnés*" ("family of the damned") that create the conspiratorial web of the textual system itself. The close conformance of the film's textual organization to the underlying structure of the conspiracy myth that preoccupied the mid-nineteenth century French imagination seems overdetermined. Historian J. M. Roberts has described the form the myth took in nineteenth century Paris in *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* (1972):

Its central image is of a community unaware of its true nature. Apparently self-conscious and self-regulating, it is, unknown to itself, in fact directed by concealed hands. These are the hands of secret societies, which are, typically affiliated in a great network covering the civilized world [. . .]. Their means are covert, but always include the manipulation of unconscious agents who do not realize whom they serve but blindly further the destructive plans of their masters. (353)

In *Paris nous appartient*, the reinscription of the criminal conspiracy myth should be read as an echo of the moral panic and national trauma that had resurfaced once again in Paris like a postwar aftershock. It can simultaneously be understood as symptomatic of the identity crisis at the heart of French film as an art and a technology.

### Musical Echoes

As Jacques Attali perceptively points out in *Noise*: "Music is prophecy" (11). Throughout the duration of Anne's investigation into the disappearance of the taped "Music of the Apocalypse," which ends in a car chase through Paris streets, Juan's music accrues significance. The haunting refrain serves as a metonymical substitution for the Existential sacrifice that Juan's death represents. Yet, this music becomes more. Attali points out that, "[. . .] listening to music is to attend a ritual murder, with all the danger,

guilt, but also reassurance that goes along with that [ . . . ]" (28). Attali, like Claude Lévi-Strauss, would argue that music and musicians themselves provide a substitute for myth in contemporary culture:

It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible, that will impose itself and regulate the order of things; it is not only the image of things, but the transcending of the everyday, the herald of the future. For this reason musicians, even when officially recognized, are dangerous, disturbing and subversive; for this reason it is impossible to separate their history from that of repression and surveillance. (11)

The ambiguous role of the musician that Attali defines is analogous to that of the film director, as both are playing a double game (12). Both musician and director serve in the duplicitous role of reproducer and prophet (Attali 12). Having been part of the Parisian underworld of criminals and outcasts, the exiled musician Juan, like the director Rivette, remained a participant in a society that he cast in a political light (director Godard surfaces as Juan's *confrère* to serve as a "fence" or middleman in this network of criminal contacts). Yet, the musician, like the director, is simultaneously destined to serve as historian and to reflect through aesthetic ritual the deeper values of society.

The myth of music and the musician paradoxically provides the impetus to the film's narrative economy, which is propelled by the paranoiac activity of eavesdropping and surveillance. The paranoia, panic, and identity crisis central to the film predict the accelerated shift into late capitalism. This global shift is reflected in the capitalist consolidation of American, British, and French nation states that together attempted to counter international communism by admitting Francoist Spain into the United Nations. The censorship effected by the surveillance apparatus of the late capitalist state, in which multinational corporations and the media play a collaborative role, is forecast by the economist Dr. De Georg, who brands Juan's music as "rubbish, pure filth" and the



musician as “a walking anachronism.” The spectator gains access to the economist’s discourse through the eavesdropping of his ward who listens outside his door, a cowed woman who represents the traumatized, automaton silence that the state demands. Similarly, Juan’s music is replaced by the high-tech simulated sound effects of waves and sea gulls that are imposed on the director Lenz by the capitalist entrepreneurship of Boileau, who will oversee and police the theatrical production.

The discourse of sound censorship that the spectator ironically overhears can also be read as a reflexive commentary on the history of cinema. The spectator is later positioned in an identificatory position with Anne who watches the silent spectacle Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1926), until the film breaks. Pierre reassures Anne tongue-in-cheek that there is no conspiracy, as the film snaps during the celebrated scene of the workers’ uprising. We are forced to recognize Pierre’s and our own unwitting complicity not only with the director Rivette but also with the projectionist De Georg who screens silent films, which are “framed” here as both an aesthetic and technological anachronism. The conspiracy plot of *Paris nous appartient* that centers on the retrieval of taped music dramatizes the listening in on, transmitting, and recording that is at the heart of the modern cinema and, in this manner, discloses the surveillance potential of the apparatus. Plot and plotting are placed on display as cinematic devices by the film’s story. *Paris nous appartient* exposes the Protean potential of the cinematic apparatus to play a collaborative role in the conspiracy that serves the interests of capital. The concerns of capital are consistent with surveillance and silencing that preclude the politics of a prophetic music.

The final scene of the film returns us to the theater in a circular fashion with the recitation of the actor's line from the unfinished production of *Périclès*: "Is this wind westerly that blows [ . . . ]." Anne's "mystic" vision of Pierre's assassination that would be impossible in theater (it is Pierre who accuses her of becoming "mystic") provides a parody of the coda of narrative closure, which the parallel plots of theatrical and conspiratorial intrigue require. Rivette relies on situationist strategies in *Paris nous appartient*. He places plots and plotting on display in his film, transforming the spectator into both a witness of and participant in an aesthetic ritual. As Sartre had attempted to forge modern myths to renew the theater, Rivette subsequently presents the myth of the theater to regenerate French film. The musical refrain that meshes with the filmic frame of wild birds dispersing across a placid lake counterpoints the final repetition of the theatrical script; both repeat the enigma with which the film began and re-present the "mystery" at the heart of Rivette's cinema.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Léon Ruth who adapted the production of *Périclès* performed at *l'Ambigu* later adapted Cyril Tourneur's *La Tragédie de la Vengeance* (*The Revenger's Tragedy*), which was performed at Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt on February 24, 1964. It is likely that Rivette, whose film *Noroît* is an adaptation of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, was both an admirer of Ruth and an *habitué* of *l'Ambigu*.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Théâtre de L'Ambigu* was originally known as *Le Théâtre de L'Ambigu-Comique*, according to Henri Beaulieu in *Les théâtres du boulevard du crime* (Paris: H. Daragon, 1905), and was founded in 1770 by Audinot, an actor from Lorraine. Audinot began with parodies to which he added *danse*, *vaudeville* acts, and the performance of a dwarf, whose act became almost as popular as that of a monkey called Turco. Audinot's modest fairground stall located on boulevard du Temple became known as *l'Ambigu-Comique*, indicating that the acts performed there were varied and included every genre (Beaulieu 24). An entry in *Almanach des spectacles 1823* reveals that boulevard du Temple became known as "boulevard du Crime" at this time and that this epithet was merited: "O mélodrame! Ô type admirable de scélératesse et de vertu! Et tu trouves d'obscurs blasphémateurs" (Oh Melodrama! Oh admirable example of villainy and virtue! Where you find lowly blasphemers) (my translation, qtd. in Beaulieu 6).

Beaulieu wryly observes, "[...] the collection of theaters in this area of Paris only put on the most somber dramas [...]" (my translation, 5). The Paris police finally cracked down on the carnivalesque revelry and chaos on boulevard du Crime, and from 1830 onwards, only theater barkers were permitted to remain. Parisians thereafter frequented boulevard du Crime solely for the pleasure of attending theater performances. This cleanup of boulevard du Crime anticipated "la grand peur," the obsession with criminals, criminality, and conspiracies that would take hold of Paris only a decade later in 1840.

<sup>3</sup> According to Philippe Chauveau in *Les Théâtres Parisiens disparus 1402-1986* (Paris: Les Editions de l'Amandier, 1999), an information meeting was immediately organized at the *Théâtre Edouard VII* to protest the decision. Among those messages of sympathy received was that of Princess Grace of Monaco, who wrote: "I am extremely concerned about the *Théâtre de l'Ambigu*. The disparition of any theater is a dramatic event; when it is a question of a theater as rich in memories as *l'Ambigu*, the event is even more serious. I will do whatever I can do to help safeguard it" (my translation, qtd. in Chauveau 56). Significant figures from the Paris theatrical community such as director Jean Vilar and actor Jean-Louis Barrault immediately began to lobby for the preservation of the theater building. André Malraux opened a procedure of inquiry regarding its demolition, but by the time Malraux's interdiction passed through bureaucratic channels on December 28, nothing remained of *l'Ambigu* but the façade and the remains of the walls. The *Théâtre de l'Ambigu* was ultimately destroyed, and today the Crédit Lyonnais occupies its place on Boulevard du Crime (Chauveau 56). The disappearance of *l'Ambigu* without a trace (no wall plaque remains to mark its existence) provides an uncanny addendum to the story of *Paris nous appartient*.

<sup>4</sup> *Pericles* is a play in five acts first performed in 1608-9. The play was derived from the classical Greek tale of Apollonius of Tyre as told in book eight of *Confessio amantis* by John Gower. The spirit of Gower opens the play and sets the stage with Pericles in Antioch seeking to marry the princess. Pericles, however, discovers the truth about King Antiochus' incestuous love for his own daughter and flees, leaving the loyal Helicanus to rule Tyre in his absence. After aiding the starving people of Tarsus, Pericles is shipwrecked near Pentapolis, where he wins the hand of the beautiful Thaisa, daughter of King Simonides. As the couple sail back to Tyre, Thaisa gives birth to Marina during a violent storm. Pericles, believing his wife has died in childbirth, buries her at sea, but she is rescued and joins the temple of the goddess Diana at Ephesus. Pericles leaves his newborn daughter with the governor of Tarsus and his wife, Dionyza. Marina, grown to young womanhood, is hated by Dionyza. Dionyza conspires to have Marina murdered, but Marina is kidnapped by pirates and sold to a brothel, where she earns her keep by singing and needlework. Marina is finally reunited with her father Pericles, mute and sick from years of grief. Pericles has a redemptive vision of the goddess Diana, who sends them to Ephesus to be reunited with Thaisa.

<sup>5</sup> In *Le T.N.P. et nous* (Paris: José Corti, 1959), Marie-Thérèse Serrière observes that music gave expression to the collective spirit of the T.N.P. by speaking to the souls of all who would listen: "The public that frequents the T.N.P. actually represents a totality, a spectrum of society. It excludes no one. It welcomes the masses as well as the

elite, the mighty as well as the humble, the public of today and of tomorrow. Theater is a assembler" (my translation, 183).

<sup>6</sup> The staging of Shakespeare in *Paris nous appartient* was inspired, in part, by the Paris première of Peter Brook's *Titus Andronicus*. During a personal interview, Rivette said that the Shakespeare productions of Peter Brook influenced him. As David Jones notes in *Great Directors at Work*, Brook began reviving Shakespeare by creating productions that exploded with meaning (202). His most ambitious reclamation project was the neglected Shakespeare drama *Titus Andronicus* starring Laurence Olivier and Vivian Leigh (Stratford, 1955; London, 1956; Théâtres des Nations, Paris, 1957), a dazzling production that earned him an international reputation.

<sup>7</sup> In *The Films of Oshima Nagisa: Images of a Japanese Iconoclast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), Maureen Turim provides an incisive discussion of Brecht's theories of theater and their translation into cinema by European and Japanese avant-garde directors. She reminds us that Brecht provides only one source of Oshima's strategies of reshaping cinematic representation, which are combined with other sources, notably Soviet agit-prop and traditional Japanese theaters.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin in "What is Epic Theater?" in *Illuminations* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968) distinguishes between Brecht's epic theater and classical tragedy: "Epic theater is in league with the course of time in an entirely different way from that of the tragic theater. Because suspense belongs less to the outcome than to the individual events, this theater can cover the greatest spans of time" (148-9). The literarization of theatre, Benjamin explains, is accomplished "through the style of acting, the placards and captions" and is intended "to purge them [events] of the sensational" (148).

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle uses the notion of imitation (*mimesis*) in the *Poetics* to distinguish between a tragedy, which observes the unities of time and place, and an epic, which need not. In *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), Stephen Orgel traces the specifically theatrical origins of the triangular tableau to the perspective settings in London theaters in 1605 (10-11). Orgel explains that in a theater employing perspective, there is only one focal point, one perfect place in the hall from which the illusion achieves its fullest effect. During court performances, this was where the king sat, and the audience around him became the living emblem of the court hierarchy. The closer one sat to the monarch, the more desirable one's place was; it served as an index to one's status, and more directly, to the measure of favor one enjoyed.

<sup>10</sup> The psychoanalytic implications of this aural repetition are elaborated in David Rodowick's *The Difficulty of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1991) with reference to Freud's analysis of a case of female paranoia. While embracing her male lover, a woman reported being suddenly frightened by a kind of knock or click. After the fact, she believed herself to have been observed and photographed in a compromising position. Freud discovers in her paranoia an instance of *der Belauschung-sphantasie* in which the

woman reproduces, without understanding, the memory of the primal scene. At one time, she had been suddenly awakened by and had overheard the sexual intercourse of the parents. Rodowick elaborates that the uncanniness of the situation derives not only from the hallucinated repetition of an unconscious memory in the woman's present sexual life, but in the splitting of her identification as a witness and as participant across the two scenes insofar as the paranoia of being observed originated in the unconscious memory of observation (100). In the eavesdropping phantasy, the subject is always split, as Rodowick reminds us, between two mutually present yet incommensurable scenes, conscious and unconscious (101).

<sup>11</sup> The story of Juan in *Paris Nous Appartient* is echoed in Alain Resnais' *La Guerre est finie* (1966). Resnais' film concerns three days in the life of an aging revolutionary Diego (Yves Montand), who thirty years after the Spanish Civil War is still working for the overthrow of the Franco Regime. Diego visits Paris where his political strategies and commitment to the struggles of the past are challenged by a young band of student terrorists.

<sup>12</sup> In *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics: Fiction and the Representation of History in Postwar France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), Lynn Higgins has pointed to the thematic of eavesdropping in the work of Truffaut, which she argues, constitutes a primal myth that is present throughout his *oeuvre*. Higgins provides a highly original and perceptive analysis of Truffaut's theatrical staging of the Occupation in *Le Dernier Métro* (1981) in terms of the thematic of overhearing.

<sup>13</sup> In *Sight and Sound* 31.1 (Winter 1961-62), critic Peter Dyer has pointed out that this scene pays homage to Robert Aldrich's celebrated film noir *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), which also explores the cold war atmosphere of paranoia and global conspiracy (21). At the film's opening, we find private investigator Mike Hammer returning to Los Angeles one night. He picks up a mysterious woman on the road named Christina, who has escaped from an asylum. Hammer's car is later run off the road. He remains semiconscious while Christina is tortured and killed and then, is thrown clear when his car is pushed off a cliff. Following the mysterious murder, Hammer follows up a number of disconnected leads, which all point to a conspiracy.

CHAPTER 3  
THE THEATRICAL TABLEAUX OF *LA RELIGIEUSE*:  
THE CONTEMPLATIVE MOMENT OF PRE-MAY 1968

A tragedy contains an infinite number of tableaux.

— Abbé Jean-Baptiste Du Bos

In some sense, the film *La Religieuse* (1965-66) represents Rivette's refusal to adapt. To extend one of André Bazin's most well-known metaphors, Rivette approaches the original artwork of Denis Diderot's eighteenth-century novel through the theater, which, for Rivette, shares with cinema the covert capacity of a crude flashlight, interesting not for the effects produced by its light, but for what it discloses in this or that dark corner (107). Indeed, Rivette's style of direction on the film set of *La Religieuse* might be likened to the fugitive beam of a flashlight, for according to the film's star performer Anna Karina, "[...] he isn't always behind the camera, he is darting in and out of all the corners, sometimes he places himself alongside the actors, he is always looking at this or that detail" (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 132). In this film, Rivette's flashlight penetrates the theatrical footlights to produce an experience of the original artwork that is finally defined by the beam of the cinema.<sup>1</sup>

The story of *La Religieuse* is based on the actual story of Marguerite Delamarre, who was locked up from early childhood—first at the convent of the Visitation de Sainte-Marie, rue du Bac and then, at the abbaye de Longchamp, which were the two convents depicted by Diderot in his novel. Like the fictional character Suzanne Simonin, Marguerite Delamarre protested against her imprisonment at the convent and rebelled

against her mother whom she felt had abused her authority by forcing her to pronounce her vows, which she later repudiated. As Leonard Tancock, the English translator of *La Religieuse* has noted, the Marquis de Croismare, a character who appears in the novel, was a real person and a member of Diderot's circle of friends known as the "Encyclopedists" (8). In 1758 the Marquis used his influence to support the appeal of Mademoiselle Delamarre, who was attempting to be dispensed from her vows. Although the Marquis never met Mlle. Delamarre personally, he was motivated solely by his sympathy for an unfortunate woman trying to free herself from the miserable life to which her parents had condemned her. In March of 1758, Marguerite Delamarre lost her trial and finished her life resigned to the oppression of convent life (Tancock 9).

Croismare decided less than a year later to retire to the provinces, leaving behind his circle of friends in Paris, including Diderot. They missed him, and consequently, decided to lure him back to Paris by appealing to his sincere nature. They pretended that a young nun had escaped from her convent and was residing with a member of the group, Mme. Moreau-Madin. Diderot began to compose letters addressed to the Marquis supposedly written by the nun, Suzanne Simonin, or by Mme. Moreau-Madin, a member of the group with whom this nun was supposedly residing. The generous Croismare was soon offering to find a position for the ex-nun in his own home, and Diderot had to use delaying strategies in the form of letters describing the girl's chronic illnesses. Finally, the practical jokers were getting into trouble, and the only way out was to finish off the unfortunate nun and end the whole affair. The final letter dated in May of 1760 detailed her death: "The dear child is no more: her sufferings are at an end, but ours may still last a long time. She passed from this world into the one whither we all are bound, last

Wednesday between three and four in the morning [. . .]” (qtd. in Tancock, Introduction 10). The death of the fictitious character Suzanne Simonin, accompanied by the letters detailing her perilous plight, consumed Diderot’s imagination and ultimately, provided the Encyclopedist with the foundation for his novel *La Religieuse*, fashioned as an autobiographical account of the life of the imprisoned nun. Although the text was completed in 1780, according to Leonard Tancock, the proper printed edition did not appear until 1796, during the post-Revolutionary period when the Directory welcomed exposures of the abuses of the Ancien Régime (11).

### **The Paradox of the Rivettian Actor**

Denis Diderot’s theoretical treatise on acting *The Paradox of Acting* was perhaps as important to Rivette’s film adaptation as the novel. It informs Rivette’s film as an intertextual frame, where it authorizes an acting style based on the fundamental heterogeneity of the real and the represented. In his text, Diderot points to this fundamental paradox: what appears natural at the theater actually represents the height of artifice. Diderot thus applauds the actor who possesses sangfroid, while rejecting the actor who displays sensibility and reproduces brute reality on the set. For Diderot, self-control and self-mastery allow the actor to artificially reproduce events that, in nature, are lived and produced spontaneously and idiosyncratically. To actors of sensibility, Diderot prefers actors “with the soundest judgments and the coolest heads” (26). Here, Diderot distinguishes between the two acting styles:

What is the time of life for a great actor? The age when one is full of fire, when the blood boils in the veins, when the slightest check troubles one to the soul, when the wit blazes at the veriest spark? I fancy not. The man whom Nature stamps an actor does not reach his topmost height until he has had a long experience, until the fury of the passions is subdued, until the head is cool and the heart under control. (26)



Diderot illustrates the difference between the real and the represented by opposing the situation of the salon to that of the stage. The salon is the place where the storyteller touches the hearts of all listeners present by spontaneously and passionately reciting anecdotes and stories. But the storyteller, as Diderot reminds us, cannot simply transfer his easy bearing, simple expression, and everyday tone to the stage or, he admonishes, "it will be the tragedy outside a booth at a fair" (21). By contrast, the theater must remain the place where the actor coldly reproduces a script that has been scientifically prepared in advance.

Balzac's portrait detailed in *Code des gens honnêtes* (1830) of the criminal as actor who "must possess a brilliantly conceived plan, [. . .] so that he can imitate the tone and manners of men from diverse social classes" echoes Diderot's earlier description of the actor:

What then, is the true talent? That of knowing well the outward symptoms of the soul we borrow, of addressing ourselves to the sensations of those who hear and see us, of deceiving them by the imitation of these symptoms, by an imitation which aggrandises everything in their imagination, and which becomes the measure of their judgment; [. . .]. And after all, what does it matter to us whether they feel or do not feel, so long as we know nothing about it? (53)

The notion of acting elaborated by Diderot, which is echoed in Balzac's description of the nineteenth-century actor-criminal, is incorporated in *La Religieuse*. During the filming of *La Religieuse*, Rivette required that the actor's performance be based on intellectual comprehension, rather than on sheer instinct or emotionalism. Karina confides that during the filming, Rivette demanded that she repeat her lines word for word, so that the text acquired a life of its own: "The text was so magnificent, I knew it

so well that it worked by itself, the text was my own" (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 132). The style of acting she describes conforms to Diderot's notion of good acting:

[ . . . ] the actor who plays from thought, from study of human nature, from constant imitation of some ideal type, from imagination, from memory, will be one and the same at all performances, will be always at his best mark; he has considered, combined, learnt and arranged the whole thing in his head; his diction is neither monotonous nor dissonant. His passion has a definite course—[ . . . ]. (15)

Karina's experience of her performance—as separate from the representation, which "worked by itself," while simultaneously totally identified with it—reflects the divided nature of the actor described by Diderot. Discussing this train of thought in Diderot, Stéphane Lojkin explains that when the actor's persona splits into two separate parts, only one half, the half that remains outside the representation, remains composed; the other half, which constitutes the character, becomes agitated with a mad delirium known as identification (33). In a 1963 review of *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), Rivette embellishes the Diderotian notion of sangfroid in his description of Charlie Chaplin's acting style, which he depicts as double-sided:

Chaplin acts and sets his act into motion, but watches himself act and watches his act through others: to organize an explosion of sense within the space of the screen, he tries out an act which will be judged by its consequences, which he weighs before us, as he goes along, making use of experimental phases and their results: the process of a man of science. (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 120)

Rivette's description of Chaplin also calls to mind Brecht's epic actor, who maintains a critical distance from the character. Brecht's observations on the nature of epic acting from this 1952 journal entry clearly reflect the Diderotian notion of the double-sided actor:

If you look soberly at what I have called epic acting, it is a type of acting that brings out the contradiction, which is there in the nature of things,

between the actor and the character he is acting, the actor's (social) criticism of the figure, to whom he must naturally give full expression, comes into play, the opinions, passions, experiences, interests of the character are not of course those of the actor, and the latter have to come out in the acting. [...] in this as in various other matters, the entry of dialectics into the theatre triggered a perceptible shock among those who accepted dialectics in other areas. (qtd. in Thomson 70)

Brecht transposes the dual nature of Diderot's actor into a dialectical acting style that is founded in Marxist dramaturgy. Rivette's conceptualization of the actor in his critical work demonstrates his awareness of both Diderotian and Brechtian theories of acting.

### From Stage to Screen

Rivette's notion of acting style is not solely based, however, on theories of theater, but on his actual experience as *metteur-en-scène* at Studio des Champs-Élysées. On February 6, 1963, Rivette made his theatrical debut there directing Jean Gruault's adaptation of *La Religieuse*. In a 1963 interview with *Le Monde*, Rivette justifies his choice of the mise-en-scène for his stage production:

It's a very classic spectacle, not at all avant-garde. For me, it's a question of rendering the story of a young woman who is forced by her parents to enter a convent in the simplest and most elegant manner possible, avoiding scenes of possession and the Salem Witch Trial aspects, which transform the play into an anticlerical attack, which it isn't. I find that the play tends towards Marivaux: something pleasant, decorative, tidy, with moments of violence. It isn't scandalous at all, in fact, it isn't scandalous enough. [...] I thought that it was going to be openly confrontational and was frankly surprised by its light and even courteous presentation: everyone has a right to interpret this particular story in his own way; everyone has HIS/HER own reasons. Moreover, the central concern is not anticlericalism; it is feminism. Above all, it is about a young woman's claim of freedom from her family, the right of the individual to choose his/her own destiny, viewed from the perspective of 1760. (my translation, n.pag.)

The stage production was financed by Jean-Luc Godard in order to feature Karina, his wife at the time. Surprisingly, the play was not a financial success, yet the experience

was crucial to Rivette's evolution as a director. He later affirmed that his work on the theater production of *La Religieuse* changed his notion of theater and, by extension, his notion of the rapport between theater and cinema:

The work that I was able to do on *La Religieuse* at Studio des Champs-Élysées gave me the feeling that the theater is something else, a more secret, more mysterious space that elicits a deeper rapport between the people who are wrapped up in their work—the rapport of accomplices. (my translation, “Le temps déborde” 7)

Rivette's experience on the stage of Studio des Champs-Élysées forced him to reassess the manner in which theater should be represented in film. Whereas the proscenium stage, the troupe, and the text were “exteriorized” in *Paris nous appartient*, placed on display before the spectator, by contrast, the codes of theater are internalized and encrypted within the textual sign system of *La Religieuse* (“le temps déborde” 7). To adapt the novel to film, Rivette covertly uses the codes of theater to convey the mysterious and especially powerful aspects of the original artwork.

Immediately following his resignation as editor-in-chief of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in April of 1965, Rivette visited producer Georges de Beauregard, who had already expressed interest in the film project. The filming of *Suzanne Simonin. La Religieuse de Denis Diderot* was completed between October and December of 1965. Neither Beauregard nor Rivette could have envisioned the reception of the film by the censors and the press. An announcement unexpectedly appeared in *Le Monde* on April 1, 1966 announcing that a total ban had been placed on the film, for France and for exportation. M. Yvon Bourges who was Charles de Gaulle's Minister of Information at the time justified his decision with these words:

This decision is motivated by the fact that the film by virtue of its nature, the behavior of certain characters, in certain situations, as well as the

repercussions of a film intended for commercial distribution, would gravely offend the consciences of a very large part of the population. These considerations are equally pertinent beyond French borders, particularly in those foreign countries where this production is capable of undermining the reputation or the authority of those organizations that might attach significance to a work that participates in the cultural or humanitarian influence of France. (my translation, qtd. in Toubiana 22)

Reacting to the ban on his film, Rivette expressed his astonishment in an interview with *Figaro Littéraire*, remarking, "It was as though they had guillotined us" (my translation, n.pag.). Jean-Luc Godard immediately responded with an open letter to the Minister of Culture André Malraux published in *le Nouvel Observateur*:

Being a cineaste as others are Jews or Blacks, I have really become fed up with having to see you and to ask you to intercede through your friends Roger Frey and Georges Pompidou on behalf of a film that has been condemned to death by the censors, that Gestapo of the Spirit. (my translation, qtd. in Toubiana 22)

Godard's letter was followed by letters from the F.E.N. (an association of over four thousand high school and university professors) and another from l'A.L.E.R.T.E (an association for freedom of expression in radio and television broadcasting), protesting the state's assault on freedom of expression. A manifesto protesting the ban—known as "des 1789"—secured 1,789 signatures, which included those of writers Marguerite Duras and Arthur Adamov, filmmakers Chris Marker and Jacques Demy, theater luminaries Jean Dasté and Jeanne Moreau. As the controversy escalated, the publishing house Editions Garnier was assailed by demands for Diderot's novel and consequently, published a new edition of *Oeuvres Romanesque* that contained all of Diderot's works, including *La Religieuse* ("Nouvelle vague" n.pag.). Although banned from the screens, Diderot experienced a revival that year on the *concours général* (national exams), where the

question was posed to high school students: "Would you agree with Diderot that reason without passion is equivalent to a king without subjects?" ("Diderot a inspiré" n.pag.)

The pre-censor board had initially rejected the scenario for Rivette's film. It was then rewritten and toned down three times to obtain the visa without which shooting on a film may not commence in France. In March of 1966, the Censor Board finally approved the revised version of the completed film. The subsequent ban of *La Religieuse* propelled the film into the press where it made the front page for months, introduced by such captions as: "Il Faut Libérer *La Religieuse*"/"Free *The Nun*" (*Le Populaire de Paris*). *Le Monde* ran a daily feature on "L'Affaire de *La Religieuse*," to which, according to film critic Elliott Stein, the public referred as they would "a weather report or horoscope" (132). Francis Mayor from *Télérama* rightly proclaimed that the publicity focusing on the state censorship of a celebrated author's work, "multiplied the scandal," damaging the Catholic church far more than the film itself could have (n.pag.). Stein points to the paradox of the scandal: "Never before had so much fuss been made over a film which only a handful had seen" (132).

Given the public outcry both in the press and within the French university system, Malraux was forced to acquiesce and allowed Rivette's *La Religieuse* to go to Cannes to avoid a scandal at the festival. As Stein observes, those who came to view Rivette's film at Cannes and were expecting a "hard-core" version of Diderot's novel were bound to be gravely disappointed (133). It was due to the film's sensitive rendering of Diderot's story that it was viewed as potentially subversive and explosive by the Gaullist government. At Cannes, the film generally received a warm reception. This review by Samuel Lachize at *l'Humanité* is representative:

Jacques Rivette, impassioned by Diderot, has adapted the novel to the screen, with much discretion and elegance. If I speak of elegance, it is of the style that I am thinking. Diderot writes well; Rivette films well. The filmic writing rejoins the literature. This is fidelity. The scandal of *La Religieuse* is an absurd affair. [...] This film must obtain its clearance visa from the censors. If not, we will sink into the arbitrary. (my translation, n.pag.)

Marcel Pagnol, a Cannes jury member, commented: "As I am a member of the jury, I don't have the right to express my opinion, but you can say that I applauded loudly" (qtd. in Lachize n.pag.). The ban on *La Religieuse* was finally lifted on July 6, 1967, and the film rapidly became a *succès à scandale* and enjoyed tremendous commercial success.

It was in the summer of 1959 during the editing of *Paris nous appartient* that Jean Gruault first approached Rivette with his adaptation of the novel. Gruault and Rivette prepared a film scenario together that, according to Rivette, initially transformed the story into a lush historical spectacle, "with carriages everywhere and a masked ball inside of the Arpajon convent" (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 128). It was not this scenario that, in the final instance, convinced Beauregard to produce the film, but rather the passion and talent of Karina in her stage performance at Studio des Champs-Élysées. In this 1963 interview, Rivette comments on the projected transition from the stage to the screen and his direction of Karina:

The scenario will be a little different, for the theater adaptation simplifies and accentuates all traits. It is also a completely different way of approaching the actor: at the cinema, one is close to the actor and everything must be more restrained; at the theater, one must externalize more; Anna Karina is very restrained; even with externalization, she remains very interior. The theatrical *mise en scène* gave me the desire to make the film. It will be very different in its method and in its tone; less pleasant, less gentle, harsher and coarser. (my translation, *Le Monde* n.pag.)

Rivette's intent to alter the tone and method did not, however, extend to the script; Karina confirms that her script remained identical: "The text was exactly the same, and it had to be repeated word for word" (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 131). Karina observes that the play's performance never elicited any scandal and that, on the contrary, many in the audience were moved to tears (Frappat 131). Given the audience's response to the play and to her stage performance, for which she had been awarded "le Prix de la Révélation" (Prize for the Most Promising Newcomer) by the press, the censorship of the film, she later confided, was especially wounding (Frappat 131).

The harsher tone of the film, coupled with the use of character typing, provoked severe criticism from some. Guy Daussois from *Le Populaire* observed, "The characters are marked by a schematization and an oversimplicity that is rarely encountered, with absolutely no human depth" (my translation, n.pag.). André Lafargue from *Le Parisien Libéré* remarked, "[the film] seemed very cold and exterior to me" (my translation, n.pag.). Rivette's use of "schematic" characterization is directly borrowed from Diderot, who advocated character typing as an integral part of his effort to construct *pièces à thèse* and a morally vital theater. In this passage, Diderot's intent is clear when he queries:

What then, is truth for stage purposes? It is the conforming of action, diction, face, voice, movement, and gesture, to an ideal type invented by the poet, and frequently enhanced by the player. [. . .] This type not only influences the tone, it alters the actor's very walk and bearing. And hence it is that the player in private and the player on the boards are two personages [. . .]. (23)

The dramatist's creation of *the Tartuffe*, *the Miser*, *the Misanthrope* necessarily contains, "their broadest and most marked features, but there is in them no exact portrait of a given individual; and that is why the real people don't recognize themselves in their types" (Diderot 39). Character typing in *La Religieuse* is modeled on the Diderotian method



where, as Felix Vexler explains, distinctive character types are opposed to “conditions” when conflict or contrast is required (56). Diderot advocated the use of character typing whenever “the duties of various professions, social stations, their advantages and dangers would furnish the basis and moral” (qtd. in Vexler 56). Confirming the efficacy of character typing in Rivette’s film, one Mother Superior impassively remarked, “All that’s happened hundreds of times in convents” (qtd. in Stein 132). Diderot affirms that it is at the moment of the elaboration of the role when the distancing process between the actor and his ideal type occurs, the doubling that is only intermittently apparent to the audience. As Lojkin notes, Diderot adopts Platonic terms to define the ideal type, which is found underlying the representation ie., the little misanthropes of the world betray the ideal prototype—the ideal—of *the* Misanthrope (34). In his film, Rivette places the distinctive character type of *the* Nun, in opposition to the *conditions* created by Family, Church and State institutions—conditions that she may resist but that ultimately precipitate her tragic fall at the film’s close.

### **The Heritage of *Cahiers du Cinéma***

The idealist notion of pure forms that is behind the greater part of classical aesthetics informs not only Rivette’s notion of acting but also his critical work at *Cahiers*. Cultural historian and film theorist, George Lellis points to Platonist idealism as the philosophical framework undergirding the formalist approach that *Cahiers* adopts in the 1950s (17). In his discussion of the importance of Brechtian philosophy and its accompanying techniques in the evolution of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Lellis considers what he terms the journal’s “apolitical Brechtian approach” during the 1950s as setting the stage for the committed criticism to follow in the post-May ’68 period (15). Lellis aligns

Rivette's serious interest in Diderot's work with his early expressions of interest in Brecht's theories of theater in order to show that Rivette served as the key transitional figure in the shift at *Cahiers* from the apolitical formalism of the 1950s to the Marxist, materialist criticism that followed. Lellis concludes that it was Rivette, in his pivotal role as editor-in-chief of *Cahiers* in the mid-1960s, who paved the way for the journal's adoption of a political Brechtian line in the years following May 1968 (37). In retrospect, Rivette's first films and his early critical work can be read as the self-conscious reflection of the *Cahiers*' heritage. Both *Paris nous appartient* and *La Religieuse* testify to his interest in Brechtian techniques as providing an alternative approach to questions of film form; just as his contemporaneous critical work at *Cahiers* demonstrates the Platonist philosophical assumptions associated with Diderotian aesthetics.

In his attempt to situate Rivette within the *Cahiers* lineage, Lellis returns to Rivette's early criticism, which he argues, reflects the Platonist preoccupation with underlying forms (18). Lellis cites Rivette's review of *Voyage in Italy* (1953), where he compares Roberto Rossellini to Henri Matisse, emphasizing the purity of geometry and forms:

All you need do, to start with, is look: note, throughout the first part, the predilection for large white surfaces, judiciously set off by a neat trait, an almost decorative detail; if the house is new and absolutely modern in appearance, this is of course because Rossellini is particularly attracted to contemporary things, to the most recent forms of our environment and customs; and also because it delights him visually. This may seem surprising on the part of a realist (and even neo-realist); for heaven's sake, why? Matisse, in my book, is a realist too: the harmonious arrangement of fluid matter, the attraction of the white page pregnant with a single sign, of virgin sands awaiting the invention of the precise trait, all this suggests to me a more genuine realism than the overstatements, the affectations, the pseudo-Russian conventionalism of *Miracle in Milan*. (191)

As Lellis observes, the Platonist overtones of this passage become pronounced later in the essay where Rivette describes Rossellini as possessing “the faculty of seeing through beings and things to the soul or the ideal they carry within them, this privilege of reaching through appearances to the doubles which engender them” and then asks, “Is Rossellini a Platonist?” to which he then responds, “Why not! He was thinking of filming *Socrates*” (qtd. in Lellis 18). The Platonist philosophical assumptions that infect Rivette’s discussion of painting and film connect his early critical perspective not only to that of *Cahiers* but also to Diderotian aesthetics.

Diderot’s conceptualization of theatrical presentation as a series of tableaux provides the impetus for the structure of *La Religieuse*. In this letter written by Diderot to a correspondent in 1780, he explains the composition of his novel *La Religieuse*: “It is filled with pathos-laden *tableaux*. It is very interesting, and all the interest is focused on the character who is speaking. . . . It is a work to be perused ceaselessly by painters; and if it were not forbidden by modesty, its true epigraph would be *son pittor anch’io*” (qtd. in Fried 200). The Diderotian literary intertext informs Rivette’s film where black wipes underscore scene changes to give each a fixed tableau definition. In many respects, the Diderotian tableau anticipates film. Diderot, Vexler conjectures, would have certainly hailed the invention of cinema “as something he had predicted and wished for” (49). Lellis advances Vexler’s assertion to claim that Diderot’s notion of the tableaux, in which the visual composition of the elements plays an essential role in the production of meaning, is “pre-cinematic” (35). To support this assertion, Lellis cites Diderot, who clearly writes, “Oh! If we could have theaters where the decors would change every time the place of the scene had to change” (35). Diderot writes elsewhere:

If the spectator is at the theater as if before a painting, where the various paintings were to pass in succession as if by magic, why wouldn't the philosopher seated at the foot of the bed of Socrates, afraid to see him die, be as pathetic on stage as the wife and daughter of Eudamidas in the painting of Poussin? Apply the laws of pictorial composition to pantomime and you will see that they are the same. (my translation, qtd. in Vexler 49)

Rivette returns to Diderot's notion of the tableau where he discovers a source of fascination dependent upon a theatrical and pictorial aesthetic.

Roland Barthes begins with Diderot's discussion of the theatrical scene and proceeds to redefine the tableau in contemporary terms as "the very *condition* that allows us to conceive theatre, painting, cinema, literature, all those arts, that is, other than music and which could be called *dioptric arts*" ("Diderot" 70). Diderotian aesthetics undergird Barthes' perception that "the *tableau* is intellectual, it has something to say (something moral, social) [. . .]; it is simultaneously significant and propaedeutical, impressive and reflexive, moving and conscious of the channels of emotion" ("Diderot" 70). The notion of tableau allows Barthes to establish the theoretical and formal connection between Diderot and Brecht, demonstrating how both theories of theater are connected to the Marxist film aesthetics of Sergei Eisenstein. Although Brecht possessed only a passing familiarity with Diderot's work, Barthes reminds us that in 1937 Brecht aspired to found a *Diderot Society*, "doubtless because he saw in Diderot, in addition to the figure of a great materialist philosopher, a man of the theatre whose theory aimed at dispensing equally pleasure and instruction" (78). Like Barthes, Lellis finds in Diderot's theories about aesthetics and theater a precedent for Brecht's theories of theater. He further claims that this hierarchy of influences shaped Rivette's films and his critical work at

*Cahiers*, which, in turn, provided the momentum for the journal's transition from a formalist to a materialist, Marxist approach (36).

Rivette's actual film practice reflects his awareness of and interest in Brecht's theories of theater, but his notion of acting style more closely conforms to the Diderotian method. In his portrait of the actor who possesses *sangfroid*, Diderot describes his double persona, in which one half remains distanced from the representation, while the other half remains identified with it (23). As we previously demonstrated, Karina's account of her performance in the film *La Religieuse* closely conforms to Diderot's portrait of the double-sided actor, which, in turn, provides the prototype for Brecht's epic actor. As Lojkin points out, the distance that the Diderotian actor takes from his own performance is not, however, the same as Brecht's notion of "distanciation," where the actor confronts the audience with the fact that he is not the character he plays and that he is not faithful to the text he recites (34). The gap between the real and the represented, which is foregrounded in Brecht, may also become incidentally evident in Diderot, but never to the degree that it disrupts spectator identification. As Lojkin observes, there is a vast difference between the critical attitude that separates the Brechtian actor from his audience and the sheer delight that the Diderotian spectator takes in repairing intermittent tears in the theatrical illusion (34). Brecht, for instance, greatly admired the performance of Helene Weigel in the role of Mother Courage, finding in her the clearest evidence of the double exposure of actor and character: "Weigel's way of playing Mother Courage was hard and angry," Brecht wrote, "that is, her Mother Courage was not angry; she herself, the actress, was angry" (qtd. in Thomson 70-71). Brecht appreciated the dialectical relation between the character and the actor, which British theater historian

Peter Thomson explains, was placed in evidence during the play as “a sort of temporarily contained hostility” that gave a disturbing edge to Weigel’s performance (71). By contrast, the spectator of the Diderotian performance takes pleasure in the masterful way the self-controlled actor interweaves the intrusion of the real into the realm of representation back into the fabric of the theatrical illusion (Lojkin 34). In this respect, however, the Diderotian spectator is also quite different from the inert, entranced spectator of classical bourgeois theater that Brecht condemned (34). Both the Diderotian actor and spectator experience the gap between the real and the representation as a temporary dysfunction in the unraveling of the representation (Lojkin 34). It is masterful work, but from it, we cannot infer the dialectical interaction characteristic of the Marxist socio-political analysis of Brechtian theater.

Brechtian criticism had already surfaced at *Cahiers* when Rivette composed his 1963 essay “Revoir *Verdoux*” in which he describes Chaplin’s performance style. In retrospect, the essay must be read as Rivette’s response to the critical reception of Chaplin’s film at *Cahiers*, not simply to André Bazin’s essay, “Le Mythe de Monsieur Verdoux,” but also to Bernard Dort’s later essay that appeared in the 1960 issue in which he cites Bazin to buttress his claim: “I need go no further for an example than *Monsieur Verdoux* which, without any misuse of terms, may be called an exemplarily Brechtian film” (240). Rivette’s essay can be read as an addendum to Dort’s statement, insofar as it adopts the tone of Barthesian structuralism:

The reconstitution of an object ‘in a manner that manifests in that reconstitution the functions of the object’: a definition, according to Barthes, of structuralist activity, which governs all of modern art. Thus Verdoux, whether it be Landru taken apart or reconstructed by Chaplin-Charlot: *simulacrum*, rigorously non-symbolic and without depth, but

*formal*: 'neither the real, nor the rational, but the functional.' (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 120)

In retrospect, the essay might be read as a manifesto announcing the new editorial line adopted by *Cahiers* when Rivette became its chief editor. Several months following the publication of "Revoir *Verdoux*," Rivette and his colleague Michel Delahaye conducted an interview with Roland Barthes, which was to be followed by a series of interviews with what *Cahiers* called "certain outstanding witnesses of contemporary culture" (qtd. in Hillier 12). This series, a direct expression of Rivette's editorial influence, represented a highly conscious attempt to extend the cultural base of *Cahiers*, an impulse that Jim Hillier claims represented thinking at *Cahiers* generally (13). Given his influential position in the development of literary and cultural criticism, Barthes served as the inaugural "witness," followed by composer Pierre Boulez and then by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (13). *Cahiers* also wanted to interview Sartre at this time; however, the interview never occurred. In 1966, Godard records that "Sartre has once again refused an interview with *Cahiers*" (qtd. in Hillier 13). The list of witnesses selected reflects Rivette's preoccupations, as it represents a cross-section of those who were influential in the evolution of his film work.

Barthes' response to Rivette and Delahaye signals the shift in *Cahiers* in the direction of a new kind of formal filmic analysis upheld by the theoretical apparatus of semiology. Barthes endorses filmic analyses that look at the way in which the signifiers that comprise the text are used. When Rivette and Delahaye ask whether a Brechtian approach can be extended to the cinema, Barthes' answer is unequivocal:

It always seems very difficult and rather pointless to transport a technique (and meaning comes under this heading) from one art to another, not because the genres have to be kept separate, but because structure depends

on the materials used. The theatrical image is not made from the same materials as the cinematographic image, it does not offer itself up in the same way to segmentation, duration, or perception. The theatre strikes me as a much more 'rudimentary,' much 'cruder,' art than the cinema (theatre criticism, similarly, strikes me as more rudimentary than film criticism); and it is therefore closer to practical tasks of a polemical, subversive and oppositional kind. (I am not talking about the theatre of consensus, conformism, and consumer satisfaction.) (282)

For Barthes, film is more closely allied to literature in its structure and in its techniques.

Barthes asserts that neither literature nor film possess the potential to sustain an aesthetics of the left. In this passage, Barthes describes the form that film should take:

What I now wonder is whether certain art forms aren't necessarily, by their very nature, their very techniques, more or less reactionary. I do not think that a literature of the left is possible. A problematical literature, yes, that is to say a literature of suspended meaning—an art which provokes answers, but does not give them. I would say that literature at its best is just that. As for the cinema, I have the impression that it is very close to literature in this respect and that, by virtue of its materials and structure, it is much better equipped than the theatre to assume that very particular responsibility of form which I have called the technique of suspended meaning. I believe that the cinema finds it difficult to deliver clear meanings and that, in the present phase, it ought not to do so. The best films (for me) are those which are best at suspending meaning. Suspending meaning is a very difficult operation which requires a great deal in the way of technique, as well as total intellectual commitment, as you have to get rid of any parasitical meanings, which is extremely difficult. (282)

Rivette's choice to adapt a novel to film might be viewed, in retrospect, as his implicit endorsement of Barthes' ideas on the interrelation between the two art forms. Rivette's discovery of the Diderotian tableau, already associated with the novel *La Religieuse*, is coincident with his movement towards Barthesian structuralism in the mid-1960s. He uses the Diderotian tableau as a distancing device in his film *La Religieuse*, where it serves as a technique of suspended meaning.



Diderot also served as a touchstone for Barthes, who affirms that Diderotian aesthetics rest on “the identification of theatrical scene and pictorial tableau” (“Diderot” 70). Rivette’s conception of the tableau originates in the “pathos-laden *tableaux*” that structure Diderot’s novel (qtd. in Fried 199-200); however, as Barthes reminds us, the tableau serves as “the very *condition*” of all dioptric art forms, including theater, painting, and cinema (70). In *La Religieuse*, Rivette uses the tableau—the theatrical scene and the pictorial tableau—as the interface to unite literary and film form. The theatricality that defines the novel also defines the film: It resides in the tableau. In a 1974 interview with Jonathan Rosenbaum, Rivette makes no apologies for the theatricality of his film’s *mise-en-scène*: “So, for me it [*La Religieuse*] was a deliberately theatrical film. The theatrical side was seen by everyone as a fault. Whereas it was in fact deliberate to have such a theatrical style of acting, with a very frontal *mise-en-scène*, in relation to the camera” (“Phantom” 24). Rivette’s film provides the pleasure of contemplating successive tableaux, and so, in Barthes’ words, it resembles “a gallery, an exhibition,” offering the spectator “as many tableaux as there are in the action moments favorable to the painter” (“Diderot” 70). The term “beholder” I borrow from Michael Fried, who in *Absorption and Theatricality* demonstrates how the painting of Diderot’s time works to exclude the beholder from the painting.<sup>2</sup> In examining Rivette’s film, I show that whatever the relationship in Diderot between the beholder and the painting, the film spectator becomes a beholder who is required to bear witness to the tableau, assuming a position where he/she must see it as well as actively interpret it.

### Theatrical Scene and Pictorial Tableaux

Rivette's *La Religieuse* opens with pictorial tableaux that reveal the drawings of Longchamp convent and portrait of Louise of Orleans, the Abbess of Chelles in 1719, making it clear that the film's story finds its source in actual historical places and personages. As the film opens, the camera travels over a seated audience and stops before an iron grille through which we see Suzanne Simonin, who enters the brilliantly lit up space of the sanctuary. The grille that separates the congregation from those officiating in the ceremony creates a visible barrier that is similar to the invisible fourth wall that separates the proscenium stage from the audience. It is from behind the grille that Suzanne initially refuses her holy vows; the vertical iron bars point to the self-enclosed space of the chancel as an undisguised acting area. Suzanne refuses to repeat her rehearsed responses, a script that would permanently condemn her to the confines of convent life. Thus, she refuses to play the role demanded of her and turns to directly address the audience gathered there, her parents, witnesses, and, of course, the profilmic spectator who also bears witness to the spectacle. Suzanne is quickly dragged away by the nuns who attempt to suppress her screams while closing the dark curtain, a kind of large veil, that separates the spectacle of her "scandalous" performance from the audience.<sup>3</sup> In this opening scene, the grille and the curtain serve to partition the filmic fiction of *La Religieuse* into the opposition between sacred and secular worlds.

Within this initial scene, the codes of theater—architectural, cultural, gestural—are encrypted within the film text. The chancel is actually a proscenium stage where religious vows are repeated like a rehearsed script, transforming the ceremony itself into a botched theater performance that closes with the hurried fall of the curtain. The

injection of codes of theater transforms the film scene into a striking vision—a tableau. In the novel *La Religieuse*, the tableau assumes the form of a classical rhetorical figure, which Jay Caplan identifies as *hypotyposis* and defines as, “a Greek word that signifies *image, tableau*. It is when the author paints the facts that he describes, as though the events described actually appeared before his eyes” (my translation, 123). Caplan observes that in the novel, such tableaux are charged with intensity and thus motivate, rather than arrest, the narrative movement (49). Caplan describes the narrative movement of the novel as paving the way for the tableaux, as if the action were enabling those instants where all movement is put on hold (49). In *La Religieuse*, Rivette transfers the rhetorical figure of *hypotyposes* to the theatrical and pictorial figure of the tableau. The opening tableau of Rivette’s film translates what Caplan refers to as the dialogic structure of the novel in which the reader is positioned both inside and outside of the representation (48–49).<sup>4</sup> The theatricality of the initial film scene allows the spectator to move outside the representation where he can maintain distance from the characters by redefining them as part of the artful composition of the tableau or to move inside the representation, where he can remain immersed in empathetic identification with Suzanne’s plight.

The plight of the nun is defined in terms of her search for a “place” in the literal sense of environmental space as well as the more figurative sense of placing or defining the self, one’s place in the world. The nun’s desire for a literal and figurative place is articulated across separate spatial regimes that are coincident with the dark and light worlds of the sacred and the secular. Within the space of her secular bourgeois family, gesture, and movement are rigidly codified, conforming to the rules and social strictures

of the Ancien Régime. The placement of Rivette's camera is characteristically at a distance from the action and held at a static, frontal angle in such a way that entrances, exits, reblockings, and so forth all occur within its purview. This technique preserves the special nature of Rivette's relation to bodily movements and gestures, most specifically, to those of the nun Suzanne Simonin. Rivette's camera frames Suzanne in a frontal perspective against the flat backdrop of her room at home, where she prays or simply reflects. In one such scene, a frontal camera angle that frames Suzanne is set in *mise-en-abyme* by the rectangular frame of an ornamental landscape painting on the wall behind her; she then kneels and falls directly forward towards the spectator, prostrate in prayer. In this carefully composed shot, Rivette opposes her body to the unyielding artifice of both religious and family rituals. In the film's opening scenes, Rivette constructs an institutional space that is associated with a potentially paralyzing theatricality, which we observe for we are situated outside of the film as if in theater seats, rather than unreflectively identified with the point of view of the bourgeoisie.

Suzanne's arrival at Longchamp convent follows her fateful decision to acquiesce to her mother's demand and to take the veil. To signify the transition from the world of her bourgeois family to the ascetic world of the convent, Rivette strips away all decorative excess from his set; the décor that remains amounts to a bed, a few wooden chairs, a night table, and curtains, which conceal the darker recesses of convent life as much as they dramatically reveal its ceremonial religiosity. Drawing on his previous experience as *metteur-en-scène* at the Studio des Champs-Élysées, Rivette returns to the sparse décor of theatrical staging in order to focus on what Bazin describes as theater's domain--the human soul (106). The soul of Suzanne Simonin is the focus of Diderot's

novel, and thus, Bazin would argue, her story belongs within the theatrical sphere: "Like the ocean in a sea shell the dramatic infinities of the human heart moan and beat between the enclosing walls of the theatrical sphere. This is why this dramaturgy is in its essence human. Man is at once its cause and its subject" (106). In Rivette's film adaptation, cinema permits the theater to assume precedence, thereby allowing man to remain the mainspring of the action (Bazin 106). Rivette relies on theatrical staging to give human priority to the dramatic structure of his film.

The institutional space of Longchamp is defined by the linear corpus of nuns who line the chapel pews, a linearity that is accentuated by the slow horizontal panning and tracking motion of the camera. The linear lines of blue habits that file through the space of the convent are reinforced by architectural structures: the horizontal and vertical lines of the grille that separate Suzanne from the secular world, the Christian crosses that adorn the convent walls, or the crisscross maze of endless corridors that seem to lead nowhere. The cavernous space of the chapel recalls that of a vast theater, an impression that is intensified by the peripheral placement of figures seated along the walls in pews. By drawing attention to the large, open surfaces that bear the inscription of a precise line, Rivette's *mise-en-scène* reproduces the abstract, primitive dimension of a Matisse painting. The sparse lighting afforded by the flickering flames of candles accentuates the cold blue interiors of the convent, while the wind whistles beyond its thick walls. Dialogue is gradually reduced to confidences whispered in the corridors, sung prayers in the chapel, and the ritualistic coda of "Ave Maria," "Deo Gratias" exchanged before bed. The cloistered atmosphere of Longchamp convent is intensified by the omnipresence of witnesses and the moral codes that these witnesses bring to bear. The punitive Mother

Superior's accusation, "There is something wrong in your mind. You have schemes" is answered by Suzanne's anguished confession, "My body is here, but my heart is not."

Certainly, the architectural and ideological center of Longchamp is the chapel, which reproduces the dimensions of a theater set that opens out into the audience. Similarly, Suzanne's apartment at Longchamp assumes the dimensions of a dressing room, where she is repetitively robed and disrobed: First, she is dressed in the bridal gown when she assents to her role as the bride of Christ; then, she is undressed when she is forced to wear a hair-shirt beneath her habit; again, she is re-dressed as a reward following her sung performance at Matins; she is completely stripped of her habit and veil following the discovery of her legal petition; finally, order is restored, and she is dressed once again before her departure from Longchamp. Suzanne's sung performance at Holy Week Matins where she admits to playing her role like "an actress in a theater" reproduces the temporal dimensions of an *entr'acte*, which is defined as a performance, which often includes music or dancing and which takes place between the acts of a play (Harrison 95). If Suzanne's concert establishes a momentary respite, an intermission of sorts, between the routine performances required of her at Longchamp, it also marks a decisive interval in the progression of the film narrative.

The film's closing sequence makes explicit the implicit connection Rivette makes between theatrical staging and the ideological staging of institutions. As Suzanne prepares for her final theatrical performance as a salon prostitute, she gazes into the mirror, her countenance hidden behind her mask that announces her new social role. She then drifts into the sparkling space of the salon, where she becomes indistinguishable from the other prostitutes who, like the nuns of Longchamp, are all uniformly dressed. In

this final scene, Suzanne joins the secular world where she is forced to recognize her own image, an ideological construction determined by yet another institutional apparatus, which mirrors the apparatus of oppression and sadistic power prevailing within the dark corridors of Longchamp. Differences between inside and outside, sacred and secular, chaste and unchaste collapse within this final scene, as the nun is momentarily caught and held within an institutional hall of mirrors that conspire to perpetually reflect her image as the crystallized creation of theatrical and ideological staging.



Figure 3.1. Suzanne as salon prostitute, *La Religieuse*. Collection BIFI, Paris.

In addition to Rivette's use of theatrical staging to defamiliarize the staging of Enlightenment ideology, Rivette makes use of the scenes of domestic conflict within the mid-eighteenth century tableaux of Jean-Baptiste Greuze. They inspire his rendering of

the domestic and institutional conflict between mothers and daughters, which in the first portion of this film runs parallel to the conflict between duty and desire, religious devotion and reality. My reading of Rivette against the intertextual frame of Greuze is inspired by Angela Dalle Vacche's close analysis of New Wave director Eric Rohmer's *The Marquise of O* (1975). In her analysis, Dalle Vacche uses not only the paintings of Greuze but also those of Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Henry Fuseli, Jacques-Louis David, Georg Friedrich Kersting, Caspar David Friedrich, and Eugène Delacroix, to show how Rohmer shifts "painting into thought," while conversely attributing a "plastic edge" to the words of Heinrich von Kleist's Enlightenment novella (81). Like Rivette, Rohmer uses paintings to achieve an adaptation that is not a direct translation from one medium to another, avoiding what Dudley Andrew refers to as "cinematizing the original" ("Adaptation" 454). Dalle Vacche stresses that Rohmer's adaptation accomplishes a refraction of word into image, "a mirroring or a duplication that also contains a reversal across different signs" (87). Like Rohmer, Rivette too makes select references to the tableaux of Greuze and Fragonard. Intertextual allusions to painting in *La Religieuse*, however, work in alliance with the codes of theater to complicate the oxymoronic relation between word and image that characterizes Rohmer's film. Additionally, the pictorial and theatrical allusions in *La Religieuse* are not solely motivated by the eighteenth-century setting of the novel, but by Diderot's extensive writings, not only on theater but on painting, such as *Essais sur la peinture* and *Salon de 1767* in which he bases his theory of pictorial composition specifically on the tableaux of Greuze and Fragonard. Rivette uses the pictorial compositions of Greuze and Fragonard to give expression not only to the novel, but also to Diderot's theories of art and theater that inform it.



Authorized by the theoretical writings of Diderot, the intertextual allusions to Greuze and Fragonard in Rivette's adaptation provide the spectator with access to the "pathos-laden tableaux" that structure the novel, rather than determining reversals between linguistic and iconic signs as in Rohmer's *The Marquise of O*.

The dramatic theme of *Le fils puni/The Punished Son* (1778) calls attention to the punitive relation between Suzanne and her natural mother Mme. Simonin. Mme. Simonin's sin of illicit love condemns her illegitimate daughter Suzanne to convent life. Because she is the product of her mother's sexual indiscretion, Suzanne must forfeit her claim to the family dowry and consequently, relinquish her hopes of a bourgeois marriage. Greuze's theme of punishment is central to the story of Suzanne and her mother. The actual gestures and the positioning of figures within the painting, however, closely resemble those depicted in the scene in which Suzanne's contractual mother Mme. de Moni offers the novice her concern, support, and love, while seated at her bedside the morning before she takes her vows. The death of Mme. de Moni is pivotal to the sequence of events that ensue in Suzanne's life. Once deprived of her mentor and protector at Longchamp, Suzanne becomes prey to a renewed cycle of punishment and violent abuse. Rivette alludes to Greuze's tableau to convey the intensity of the relation between both natural and contractual mothers and their mutual daughter, Suzanne Simonin, in terms of punishment, love, and loss. The spectator is required to behold the genuine gestures of Mme. de Moni, a sensuous expression of her authentic values and her religious devotion and of her true affection for Suzanne; during this moment of contemplation, the sensuous moralism of Greuze must be read against the rigid posturing of Mme. Simonin whose false piety ultimately seals her daughter's tragic fate.



Figure 3.2. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Punished Son* (1778). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Sentimentalism and moralism characterized Greuze's approach to subjects of family sentiment and domestic virtue. Rivette's allusions to Greuze's excessively sentimental compositions in his film, however, do not affirm the values associated with the bourgeois family but offer an implicit critique of these values, providing the spectator with a pedagogical lesson. As Dalle Vacche observes, Diderot also found the excessive emotionalism of Greuze's tableaux "pedagogically useful" (97). Barthes observes that it is precisely this "pedagogical" quality that Greuze's tableaux share with those of Soviet montage director Sergei Eisenstein: "Nothing separates the shot in Eisenstein from the picture by Greuze (except, of course, their respective projects: in the latter moral, in the



Figure 3.3. Suzanne receives solace from Madame de Moni, *La Religieuse*.

former social)" ("Diderot" 71). Similar to the solemnity of the peasantry, who haunt Eisenstein's tableaux in *Battleship Potemkin* and *Strike*, gravity and disquiet inflect the facial expressions of Rivette's characters in *La Religieuse* and thereby, offset the exaggerated gestures and theatrical movements of Greuze's paintings (Dalle Vacche 97). In *La Religieuse*, Rivette invokes the pathetic action and expression of Greuze to invent an intertextuality that, in Barthes' terms, "suspends meaning," charging certain instants with such intensity that narrative movement comes to a halt and audience attention is drawn to a single tableau.

The tableau that depicts the death of the saintly Mme. de Moni provides a momentary pause; the narrative quickly regains momentum, however, in its orchestration

of Suzanne's sharp descent into a dark abyss of institutional sadism and relentless abuse. As a product of the eighteenth century, Suzanne cannot express her deep desires, fears, or despair in unconscious fantasies, and consequently, she projects her body, rather than her mind, across narrative space. Within the angular, labyrinthine cloister of Longchamp, these spontaneous gestures stand out and are read as the symptoms of her possession. Satan now occupies her body, or so it would seem, which had previously belonged to God. In the corridor of the convent, Suzanne solicits the compassionate support of another sister, her arms outstretched in supplication, when a group quickly encircles her, spitting on her body that they believe to be possessed by Satan.



Figure 3.4. Suzanne's fall at Longchamp Convent, *La Religieuse*.



Figure 3.5. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Paternal Curse* (1777-1778).  
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Greuze's painting *Le Fils Ingrat/The Paternal Curse* (1777-1778) inspires Rivette's portrayal of the violent battle waged by the Machiavellian Mother Superior for the soul of her wayward daughter Suzanne. The wording of the painting's title is echoed in the maternal curse of Mme. Simonin, whose bitter words follow Suzanne's initial rejection of her vows: "Votre conduit est d'un *ingrat*." ("You are still an *ungrateful* child"). The focus of Greuze's canvas on patriarchal authority recalls the curse of paternal disinheritance that severed Suzanne from her family and the possibility of a bourgeois marriage, thereby condemning her to convent life. Held captive at Longchamp, Suzanne's passionate nature seeks expression through her bodily movement,

providing the pretext for the exorcism of her body. As Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen explains, exorcism was a form of sociotherapy that served as the historical precursor of Freudian psychoanalysis (51). Within the convent, exorcism assumes the form of institutional rape. Dragged through the labyrinthine bowels of the convent, Suzanne is finally isolated in her cell where she awaits her exorcism, bloodied and denigrated. The red that stains her dress and the concrete floor also appears in association with the law: red saturates the rear wall of the legal chamber as well as the large crucifix that hovers ominously over the heads of the magistrates, whose discussions seal the tragic fate of Suzanne's legal petition; red overtones also illuminate the chamber where the lawyer M. Manouri meets with Suzanne to discuss her case. Led by their Abbess, the nuns enter Suzanne's cell and encircle her, conveying their moral dictates through the religious codes that they explicitly state or embody in their rigid, unremitting postures. Suzanne's body posture and gestures of supplication resemble the heroic, grandly pathetic action and expression of Greuze's figures. At the instant that Suzanne extends her arms outward to be bound and bows her head beneath the black blindfold, it is as though the film scene were momentarily transformed into a station of Christ's Calvary. Be it in novel or in film, the insertion of such tableaux require the beholder to witness the successive trials of Suzanne as part of the Passion that, as Fried points out, constitutes the narrative (49). One of the small but highly significant changes Rivette made in his adaptation of Diderot's text is his addition of the final scene, which depicts Suzanne's final trial in a tableau that completes the Passion story. Confused and disoriented within the salon of prostitutes, Suzanne once more refuses her role and moves stealthily towards an open window. She suddenly jumps, offering a chilling parody of a theatrical exit. The camera frames her

body on the ground, a dazzling figure crucified against a black night sky. The spectator is required to read this final tableau as a crucifixion, and as a solemn requiem for the martyred body of the nun at the moment of her death.

Upon her departure from Longchamp, Suzanne is repositioned at the center of an alternative order, a worldlier convent. Our introduction to the new convent is provided in the figure of Madame de Chelles, who is drawn from Adelaide d'Orleans, a notorious Abbess. This Mother Superior authorizes a new social order, which overturns and inverts the moral codes and prohibitions governing the old order of Longchamp. She immediately repositions Suzanne at the center of her alternative family. The seemingly tranquil and sensual ambiance of the worldly convent directly opposes the highly moralized, emotionally charged configurations of Suzanne's contractual family at Longchamp as well as the bleak hypocrisy of the bourgeois Simonin family. Whereas the punitive Mother Superior of Longchamp had sadistically enforced, and even exploited, the patriarchal moral codes and prohibitions of church and state institutions, Mme. de Chelles insists on an open, idyllic order based on sensual pleasures, such as food, flowers, intimate gestures, and perhaps above all, music. This different conception of convent life is inaugurated with Suzanne's premiere harpsichord performance of "Plaisir d'Amour" ("The Pleasures of Love"), which provides a musical response to the religious dirge required of her during her interview at Longchamp. During her concert, Suzanne is situated at the spatial center of an alternative configuration, where an absorbed audience of nuns is drawn towards her, or more specifically, to the innocence and chastity of her body. The occasional cooing of doves and soft laughter of the nuns accentuates the mood of blissful intoxication.

The transition to this space of seduction is signified through a dramatic shift from the dark blue interiors of Longchamp to the light, extravagantly lush settings of the secularized convent, where transgressive passion is soon aroused. Rivette's references to the rococo seductions of Jean-Honoré Fragonard disclose the turbulent passions that exist just beneath the smooth veneer of family and institutional manners. The vertiginous ensemble of foliage, fountain, and cloud in Fragonard's *Blind Man's Buff* (1775) inspires Rivette's rendering of the initial rendezvous between Suzanne and Mme. de Chelles within the convent garden. The scene provides a visual allusion to the title of the painting, for Suzanne is literally blindfolded in the scene, spinning at the center of the band of nuns who flutter around her.



Figure 3.6. Nuns playing blind man's buff with Suzanne, *La Religieuse*.





Figure 3.7. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Blind Man's Buff* (1775).

Samuel H. Kress Collection, Photograph © Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art Washington, D.C.

Reminiscent of previous scenes at Longchamp, her arms are again outstretched to the nuns who encircle her, and she is again blindfolded. Although the giggling and frolicsome play of those around her distinguishes this landscape from that of Longchamp, Suzanne's blindness to those forces surrounding her coupled with the blithe oblivion of others serve as an ominous portent of darker forces, which will soon surface. Rivette shoots the scene in deep focus to capture, what Fried describes as, the "unequalled lightness and suppleness of touch" associated with Fragonard, whose treatment of amorous subjects produced images of "rapture and transport" (138). The film scene is

suffused with an almost dreamlike atmosphere that, like Fragonard's tableau, associates states of reverie with the experience of nature. Similar to the composition of Fragonard's tableau, multiple centers of interest capture our attention as the scene unfolds, such as the Convent that dominates the distant background and the neoclassical statue that occupies the left of the scene. These architectural configurations are counterbalanced by the presence of Mme. de Chelles and Suzanne who retreat to the right. The quiet intensity of their conversation is offset by the tone of gay frivolity that animates the group of nuns, a tension that is marked in the scene by the flickering contrast of light and shadow. The quiet intimacy of the nuns' conversation within the privacy of the convent garden intensifies to the point of erotic delirium in the scenes that follow.



Figure 3.8. The seduction of Suzanne in the convent garden, *La Religieuse*.



Figure 3.9. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Love Letters* (1771-73), detail.  
 © The Frick Collection, New York.

Fragonard's tender portrait *The Love Letters* (1771-73) inspires Rivette's rendering of the seduction of Suzanne by the fountain. Rivette opens the sequence with an establishing shot of a lush garden setting, which alludes to Fragonard's *The Meeting* (1771) in which a chivalrous suitor playfully, but persistently, pursues his beloved within a secluded garden. The film scene recodifies Fragonard's depiction of heterosexual gender relations to reveal instead the playful flirtation of two nuns, who pursue each other around the base of a neoclassical bust. The light homoerotic overtones of this scene set the stage for the more intense erotic overtures of Mme. de Chelles towards Suzanne in the following scene. The pose of the two women seated at the edge of a fountain precisely reproduces that of the two lovers in *The Love Letters*, except that, once again,



Figure 3.11. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Meeting* (1771), detail. © The Frick Collection, New York.



Figure 3.10. The flirtation of the nuns, *La Religieuse*.

the heterosexual dynamic of Fragonard's tableau is reconfigured within the film scene. As if to complement the tableau with her seductive overture, Mme. de Chelles invites Suzanne to re-envision herself by looking at her body: "Have you never looked at yourself and been pleased to see how beautiful you are?" Mme. de Chelles literally and metaphorically holds up a mirror before Suzanne—it is she who places the mirror in Suzanne's room—inviting her to recognize her own body as an eroticized image. The tableau complemented by the seductive exchange calls attention to the construction of Suzanne as an image that is produced to be consumed within the space of yet another institutional apparatus.

These references to Fragonard's rococo seductions give expression to the lightness, the sensuality, and the musicality of the secular convent. Yet this shift to a softer, calmer atmosphere belies the madness and the darker, more intense, passion that is unleashed as Mme. de Chelles' desire for Suzanne becomes uncontrollable. This shift in tone from light to dark is signaled through reference to Fragonard's *The Bolt* (1780). The tableau details the grandly pathetic action of a young man clasping a girl who is attempting to reject him. The billowing curtains and colored chiaroscuro that create the oneiric mood of Fragonard's tableau inspire Rivette's rendering of the impassioned delirium that first overtakes Mme. de Chelles at Suzanne's bedside and then later, when she implores Suzanne to open her locked door with arms stretched out in anguished supplication. Fragonard's tableau *The Bolt* has been read as either the story of an impassioned seduction or as a violent rape. This duplicity also inflects Mme. de Chelles' seduction of Suzanne, which shifts effortlessly from scenes of light and playful flirtation to scenes that display a baroque obsession that borders on violent intrusion.



Figure 3.12. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Bolt* (1780). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

If a fascination with possession drives the dark seduction scene, which is perhaps the most intense and emotionally charged scene in the film, it preoccupies Rivette as metteur-en-scène, who asserts that the notion of “possession” is at the core of theatrical, pictorial, and literary representations: “*Possession, possession . . . La possession est impossible.*” Of course, a painter, a writer, a metteur en scène fantasizes about the idea of possession, all the while knowing that it doesn’t exist [ . . . ]” (“Conférence de presse” n. pag). The notion of possession characterizes not only Rivette’s approach to his actors, but also his approach to the adaptation of Diderot’s text. Certainly, as a metteur en scène, Rivette realizes from the outset that it will be impossible to fully possess and thereby,



Figure 3.13. Madame de Chelles at Suzanne's bedside, *La Religieuse*.

reproduce the literary text, yet he is nonetheless fascinated by the possibility. Similar to the cautious overtures of the seductress, the successive tableaux that he quietly offers the spectator to behold serve as mirrors through which he captures and re-presents the era's visualization of itself (Dalle Vacche 92-4).<sup>5</sup> Such tableaux are offered to the beholder not simply for passive adhesion, but to encourage active individual contemplation. Rivette comments on the interrelation between painting and cinema: "Painting is among the greatest temptations of the cinema, yet at the same time, it is only a temptation, since everyone already knows that cinema is also the contrary of painting" ("Conférence de presse" n.pag.). Painting tempts Rivette the filmmaker with the seductive possibility of fully possessing space, of delimiting the spatial infinity that might be the provenance of

cinema by adopting a “pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible” (Barthes, “Diderot” 70). The pictorial tableau, for Rivette, becomes emblematic of the generic pleasure of possessing the text, thereby allowing the filmmaker to indulge in the fantasy that he can fully possess the novel.

Yet in *La Religieuse*, it is not only the theatricality, the dramatic compositions, of classical figurative painting but also that of the theater that Rivette adopts to stage Diderot’s novel. Indeed, the intertextual interaction between cinema and painting in Rivette’s film relies on what Dalle Vacche describes as, “a shared sense of theatrical space, one not based on artificial display but linked to the world through the presence of actors” (82). As Dalle Vacche astutely observes, painting in film emerges through acting, through the “overlapping of the world with the theater, of staging with reality” (94). Although paintings remain transparent in *La Religieuse*, the striking dramatic compositions of Greuze and Fragonard charge certain instants in the film with such intensity that narrative movement comes to a halt and audience attention is drawn to a single tableau as a form of introspection. Yet it is not Rivette’s intent in *La Religieuse* to construct an aesthetic, artificial space polarized exclusively towards the center, but to achieve interplay between the introspective orientation of the tableau and the centrifugal space of the screen. The conjoining of pictorial tableau and theater scene within *La Religieuse* subtends Rivette’s fantasy of possession of Diderot’s text; however, the filmmaker also recognizes that his illusion of possession, which propels the adaptation, must remain unattainable, as it is premised on a denial of cinema’s domain that ultimately extends to that “diffuse space without shape or frontiers that surrounds the screen” (Bazin 107).



### From Japanese Cinema to Theater

The theatricality of Rivette's film style that maintains distance between spectator and spectacle is also modeled on that of Japanese film director Kenji Mizoguchi. During an interview with Jonathan Rosenbaum, Rivette offered these insights into the influence of Mizoguchi on his cinema, specifically on *La Religieuse*:

*La Religieuse* may appear to be an uncharacteristic work, but it isn't one for me. It was my idea to make a film in the spirit of Mizoguchi. But it's not Mizoguchi. There was an attempt to make a film with extended takes or even one-shot sequences, with a flexible camera and rather stylized performances. So, for me it [*La Religieuse*] was a deliberately theatrical film. (*Phantom* 24)

Mizoguchi does, in fact, provide Rivette with a source of inspiration in *La Religieuse*, insofar as Mizoguchi's cinema, as Dudley Andrew points out in "The Passion of Identification," "opens a possibility in the brutal opposition between identification and interpretation" (38). The Mizoguchian de-dramatization and the distance produced by the shot-sequence allow Rivette to present "an image" of the situation, rather than to decompose the situation in montage and to develop character psychology. In an interview with Serge Daney, Rivette comments on his affinity for the shot-sequence:

I know lots of filmmakers who consciously or unconsciously work on the idea of the body which is fragmented, it could be the hand or any part of the body, but the face is the privileged part of the fragmented body. I know when I get behind the camera and look down the lens, my instinct is to move further and further back because when I see the face, I want to see the hands, then the body. Yes, I think I always want to see the body as a whole, then the body in relation to the sets, then the body with whom the body acts, interacts, moves, etc. It is simply because I haven't the temperament, taste, or talent to make films that are montage oriented. On the contrary, my films work on the basis of continuity of events, dealt with in a global way. (*le Veilleur*)

Rivette's predilection for distance over proximity, empty over full space, the whole over the part, and concealment over display, aligns his style with the cultural perspective that

Iwamoto Kenji argues comes from Japanese tradition (14). Whereas the close-up draws the spectator's attention to the decisive or important moment, as Iwamoto points out, the Japanese mode of expression gives precedence to the long shot (14). Although Iwamoto focuses on silent Japanese cinema, he points out that the psychology of "avoiding portraiture" lives on in the scarcity of close-ups from the silent era to the age of the talkies (15). The film masterpieces of Mizoguchi, such as *Zangiku monogatari* (*The Story of the Last Chrysanthemum*) (1939), *Genroku chushingura* (*The Loyal 47 Ronin*) (1941-42), *Joyu Sumako no koi* (*The Love of Sumako the Actress*) (1947), and *Sansho dayu* (*Sansho the Bailiff*) (1954), may be taken as representative of the Japanese perspective associated with the lack of the close-up. Modeling his film closely on those of Mizoguchi, Rivette is drawn instead to the episodic form and its de-dramatization of the narrative event. Preserving the spirit of Mizoguchi, *La Religieuse* manages to deeply impress its audience through maintaining camera distance.

Rivette shares the Japanese director's most prominent concern that spans throughout all his periods and genres, which is with women—their gestures, their stylized motions, and their movement through space. In characterizing the director's style, film critic Alain Masson describes Mizoguchi's obsessive gaze at the bodies of his heroines; in his films, the falling motion of his heroine is emblematic of her response to those forces that threaten to overwhelm her:

Nothing is more proper to them than this manner of falling, nothing signifies as this, anything other than their person: at the moment when everything beats her down, the Mizoguchi heroine does not harden since the breadth and the grace of her fall does incarnate, sooner or later, her essence and her freedom. (26)

The stylistic legacy that Rivette inherits from Mizoguchi is not only apparent in his film, but in his own remarks concerning his relation with Anna Karina in *La Religieuse*:

“Anna, like Juliet (Berto) or Bulle (Ogier) to name but three actresses, what I particularly like about them [...] is their globality, the global way their bodies move and react from head to toe. That’s exactly what I try to capture on film” (*le Veilleur*). Karina’s character Suzanne Simonin resembles the Mizoguchian heroine; as her character is constructed primarily through her own bodily attitudes, her gestures, poses, and facial expressions, justifying Adriano Apra’s description of her as a “sculpture in the round” (146). From Philippe Roger’s claim that Rivette’s cinema moves “from an attitude (of spirit) to the attitude (of the body)” (46), we may conclude that Rivette’s cinema is based upon a similar aesthetic principle as that of Mizoguchi; both directors stress the plasticity of the body in space.

In Rivette’s *La Religieuse*, the movement and placement of bodies in space not only share the formal qualities of Japanese cinema, but also those of Japanese theater. Beginning in the early 1960s, Asian theater was becoming a highly visible presence in Paris. In November of 1960, the well-known theater journal *Cahiers Renaud-Barrault* published a special issue devoted exclusively to Asian theaters, focusing specifically on Japanese theater. In “Aspects du Théâtre Classique Japonais,” René Sieffert explores the possible connections between Japanese Nô and Western avant-garde theater. In his article, Sieffert sketches the parameters of an expanding theoretical debate concerning the hybridization of Eastern and Western aesthetics, a discussion that not only would engage the editorial staff of *Cahiers Renaud-Barrault*, but which would spread throughout the French theater and film communities during the 1960s:

Even down to the most minute details, to the minor peculiarities of the vocabulary attributable to time and geographical distance, the text composed by Zeami around 1400, which contains his reflections on Nô drama and his instructions to his students, will not surprise a western man of the theater. It is immediately accessible and applicable to our contemporary theater; indeed it speaks to the most audacious productions of the avant-garde. The behavior of the actor, the psychology of the spectator, the tricks of the trade from the most obvious to the slightest detail, and even the most subtle aesthetic analysis, these topics touch us directly, without any transposition necessary; all this finds its immediate application in the most engaged theater practice.<sup>6</sup> (my translation, 25)

Jean-Louis Barrault's tour through the Far East with Théâtre de France in 1960 provided the immediate impetus for the issue, which includes the excerpts from the actor's notebooks written during the tour.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps it was Barrault's impassioned description of Nô as "a ritualistic, religious theater," which had excited Rivette's imagination, or Nô theater's resemblance to classical Greek theater in its stylized use of metric verse, choral interventions, chants, dance, and music accompanied by an actor and a chorus, which had initially engaged him (38). Whatever the pretext, Rivette valued the unique capacity of Japanese theater—its restraint, discipline, and artifice—to represent the insular reserve of convent life during the final years of the Ancien Régime.

Between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Nô drama developed into a kind of opera performance, in which, as historian Arthur Waley notes, the performers alternately danced and recited (15). There are only two main characters in contemporary Nô performances, the *Waki* and the *Shite*. Certainly, the Manichaean quality of Nô drama seems well suited to depict the irresolvable opposition between Suzanne and her Mother Superior at Longchamp. The ceremonial movements and attitudes of the nuns recall those of the *tzare*, who serve as the attendants or shadows of the main characters of the Nô performance, and whose function is to add ceremony and pageantry. The function

of the *tzare* is similar to that of the Chorus, a technique that Rivette also adapts from the Nô. Dramatist Paul Claudel, who used Nô techniques in his dramas to create a “total theater,” describes his perception of the Chorus: “It tells what has gone before, describes the scene, develops the theme, and explains the characters” (53).<sup>8</sup> While the Chorus takes no part in the events of a Nô performance, merely supplying impersonal narration, Rivette’s Chorus of nuns at Longchamp takes sides for or against characters. The nuns at Longchamp serve as the attendants of their Mother Superior, shadowing her movements, while voicing their support of her and their contempt for Suzanne. The Chorus in *La Religieuse* exists not only as a formal theatrical element existing midway between the principal actors and the audience, but also as a force that intervenes in and helps to shape the drama as the events unfold.

Rivette’s Chorus differs from that of Nô, as it is modeled after Roman Catholic Church choirs and represents the liaison between the Church authority and the congregation, its implied audience of listeners. The Chorus functions to express the Church’s official message, its feelings and its dictates. According to Waley, the chanting of the Nô Chorus often does resemble that of a Roman Catholic priest, while assuming the character of the “recitativo” in opera, occasionally shifting into actual song (33). In *La Religieuse*, the theatrical functions of the Chorus vary: Nuns speak in singsong tonalities to each other in the corridors of Longchamp or in lilting cadences within the walls of the secular convent, reinforcing by turn the mystical quality or quotidian aspects of their existence. When reciting or singing Biblical verses, the Church choir more closely resembles Claudel’s Chorus in his opera *The Diary of Christopher Columbus* (1927), which, as Bettina Knapp affirms, litanizes, psalmodizes in rhythmic patterns,

allowing for an occasional pause in the drama's progression (*Claudiel* 243). Knapp notes that Claudel looked upon music, specifically the music and dance of Nô drama, as a means "to prolong and to accentuate both lyrical and dramatic moments, emphasizing words, gesture, and the composition of scenic design" (236). Words and songs within *La Religieuse* place distance between the spectator and the spectacle by providing an implicit commentary on the violent nature of events within the convent walls. The effect of distance and separation is similar to that produced by the Nô drama, which Claudel describes as creating both estrangement and engagement: "Everything happens within the audience, which feels both involved and remote at the same time" (52).

The distancing effect created through the use of songs and words within *La Religieuse* is sustained through the mechanics of an Asian acting style. The acting style demanded of Nô performers is commensurate with Diderotian dramaturgy. Here, Claudel's description of the paradox of the Nô actor echoes Diderot's: "By an amazing paradox, the sentiment is not within the actor, but the actor within the sentiment. He acts out his own thought before us, and bears witness to his own expression" (55). Although directly opposed to the religiously oriented themes of Claudelian dramaturgy, Brecht's plays likewise demonstrated the "cold" performance style that he had discovered in Chinese acting. Echoing Claudel, Brecht describes the Asian actor in terms reminiscent of Diderot's notion of sangfroid: "The Chinese artist's performance often strikes the Western actor as cold. That does not mean the Chinese theatre rejects all representation of feelings. The performer portrays incidents of utmost passion, but without his delivery becoming heated" (93). Brecht held up Asian acting style as an alternative to the Stanislavskian style of "complete conversion" (93). He insists that the Asian acting

method is preferable to that of “complete conversion,” as it has become difficult for Western actors “to conjure up particular inner moods or emotions night after night; it is simpler to exhibit the outer signs which accompany these emotions and identify them” (94). Brecht acknowledges that although the Chinese actor’s A-effect is produced in association with magic, it nonetheless provided him with a “transportable technique” and “a conception that can be prised loose from the Chinese theatre” and thus applied to a realistic and revolutionary theatre (95). Brecht, as Barthes points out in *Empire of Signs*, locates the distance made available by the techniques of Asian acting at the center of his revolutionary dramaturgy.<sup>9</sup> Rivette locates this distance at the center of Diderot’s classical, readerly text and uses it along with other codes of theater to re-write the original as an allegorical, writerly text.<sup>10</sup>

The centrality of the actor within the drama is key to the performance style of both Nô and Kabuki drama. Claudel describes Nô theater as focused on the actor, rather than on the event, maintaining: “In drama something happens, but in Nô drama someone happens” (52). Similarly, the Kabuki performance focuses the attention of the audience on the fixed moment of the actor or actress’s pose or *mie*. Rivette’s method that offers the audience a series of fluid forms coming into “fixation” one after another in successive tableaux is commensurable with Kabuki dance style. Historian Earle Ernst situates the Kabuki pose within the context of Japanese art and tradition:

Japanese art tends always, as it does in the *haiku*, toward the isolation of the single, significant, visual moment. [...] In the Kabuki the highest points of interest are those in which the actor’s movement resolves into a static attitude in a *mie* or in a tableau. The pose of Kabuki dance is always more expressive than the movements that preceded it. (76)

The total impression of Kabuki dance movement is one of a series of concrete visual images rather than the continuing impression of movement in time and space characteristic of Western dance. As a result, a characteristic quality of Kabuki acting is that it is not concerned with depicting subtle and fluid transitions from one emotion to another, but instead the actor tends to present the character in a succession of unrelated, detached moments. Thus, as Ernst points out, the audience of a Kabuki performance “comes to the theatre to see a succession of striking images” (76). These static poses may be in the form of a *mie* or a tableau, which is always preceded by increasingly rhythmic movements that reach equilibrium in the pose. As Ernst points out, the effect of the *mie* is sculptural, closely resembling certain figures of Buddhist sculpture (178).

The successive tableaux that structure the film *La Religieuse* resemble the significant moments in a Kabuki dance performance, which are not realized in movement but in the achievement of a static attitude. Rivette’s use of black wipes accompanied by neo-Japanese sound effects to emphasize scene changes stresses the achievement of such fixed moments: Its first occurrence marks the culmination of the film’s initial scene in which Suzanne projects her body outwards from the chancel in supplication before her audience of witnesses; it occurs again to demarcate the moment when Suzanne, having retired to her room after the tense confrontation with her mother, once more falls directly forward in prayer; perhaps, most dramatically, it marks the successive intervals in the intense encounter between the Mother Superior and Suzanne following the Superior’s discovery of the nun’s petition to renounce her vows. Neo-Japanese sound effects and wooden clappers mark the dramatic escalation of the sequence, which proceeds as the two walk through the convent corridors and culminates at the moment when Suzanne



throws her body across the room, screaming at her Mother Superior in frustration and anguish. This tableau effect that Rivette creates recalls the scene changes during the Kabuki performance, when wooden clappers (the technique known as *kikkake*) call attention to the opening or closing of the Kabuki draw curtain that delimits distinctive scenes. To mark such moments, the beating of the clappers gradually accelerates in tempo to a climax, a basic pattern of Kabuki that Ernst compares to the gradual building up of a wave as it moves towards the shore (113). The Kabuki performance assumes a single line of progression, which at certain intervals solidifies into the significant tableau, which Ernst differentiates from the Western cumulative, symphonic form (173-4). In its capacity to resolve itself, in visual effect, in a succession of striking postures, *La Religieuse* moves in a manner similar to that of the Kabuki performance (Ernst 173).

As we have seen, the successive tableaux that show the distinctive trials of Suzanne Simonin create the sensation of moving from fixed moment to fixed moment in Rivette's film. Certainly, *La Religieuse* reflects a Diderotian aesthetic in its use of pictorial and theatrical tableaux; however, it also adapts the *mie* or tableau associated with Kabuki performance. Rivette's camera that precisely details the movements and attitudes of his characters and the objects that surround them is reminiscent of the presentational aesthetic of the Kabuki theater, where the rhythms and modulations of the body frequently take precedence over the script. As in Rivette's film, the three-dimensionality of the actor is emphasized in the Kabuki theater by the placement of the performer's body against a flat surface. Whereas Western representational theater attempts to penetrate the space behind the actor illusionistically, as Ernst notes, the aesthetic purpose of the Kabuki background is to suggest such a penetration theatrically

in two dimensions, thereby establishing a visual opposition that will stress the plasticity of the body (132). The *mise-en-scène* of Rivette's film draws on the presentational aesthetic of Japanese theater to isolate the postures and gestures of Suzanne from the momentum of narrative events.

As the chapel reproduces the dimensions of a theater and as Suzanne's apartment assumes the dimensions of a dressing room, the long corridors in both convents serve in a similar capacity to wings of a theater. In the Kabuki the wings are replaced by *hanamichi*, an architectural feature of the theater that determines the movement of the actor toward the audience. Characters thus can enter on opposite sides of the theater and, forming their position on two passageways, could make the entire auditorium an acting area. In *La Religieuse*, the corridors of the convents serve a similar function as the *hanamichi*, which is used as a kind of private, personal stage for the character, as opposed to the stage proper where the actor mingles with other characters and becomes part of a theatrical complex of events (Ernst 102). Ernst describes the action of the character on the *hanamichi* as a "soliloquy in movement" (102). Like the soliloquy, the character's performance on the *hanamichi* achieves a more direct and intimate contact with the audience than when the character is engaged with the other characters. The more moving moments of *La Religieuse* occur in the remote, cut off corridors of the convent, which resemble the *hanamichi* insofar as nothing interposes between the actress and the audience. The most terribly intimate moment in the film occurs in the candlelit corridors of the worldly convent, where the distraught Mother Superior throws her body desperately against the locked door of Suzanne's room in an impassioned gesture, disclosing her anguish and desire to the audience.

Like the Mizoguchian heroine, Suzanne's refusal to submit to the rules and restrictions imposed on her by social institutions of church and family is expressed by the figure of her fall through space. The figure of the woman falling within *La Religieuse* indicates the successive stages in the movement of the heroine Suzanne in her search for self-revelation and self-definition; it is articulated across the indoor and outdoor tableaux of sacred and secular convents. Longchamp is shown to be a flat surface—especially in the two-dimensional quality of its characters and its decors—against which Suzanne's falling motion is physically and metaphysically defined as centrifugal. Consequently, our attention is drawn to the plasticity of her body as an isolated dark figure moving outwards in search of a private place. Suzanne's falling motion is defined conversely as centripetal within the secular convent. Here, Suzanne resides in the eye of an institutional force field that, as Thierry Jousse observes, is set into motion and that progressively encircles her in an effort to touch, to capture, and to enclose her body (25). Our attention is consequently focused on her body as spectacle, a prohibited object of desire that is centrally positioned within a transgressive social sphere as the object of the voyeuristic gaze. The liberating outdoor vistas that had initially provided both Suzanne and the spectator with visual deliverance from the claustrophobic space of Longchamp is exposed as a seductive illusion. As the discontented priest describes to Suzanne the tragic reality of her sealed fate, her body is viewed in a mirrored reflection, an image poised and held between the dual institutional apparatuses, which govern sacred and secular spaces, spaces that finally have become identical. In her perpetual search for a "place," both in the literal sense of environmental space as well as in the more figurative sense of one's place in the world, the movement of Suzanne shifts at this apex point within the filmic fiction to a final

irretrievable fall outwards from the world. The epic heroine of *La Religieuse* mirrors the Mizoguchian heroine Sumako, who in the final scene of *The Love of Sumako the Actress* (1947) also commits *seppuku* or ritual suicide. Like Suzanne Simonin, Sumako sought to transcend her condition in the world with her response, which included her gestures, her movement, and her falling motion through space.

Rivette looks through drama to its context, not reading the scene from a critical perspective but sympathizing with it—through distance and separation—one of the qualities that Rivette's cinema shares with that of Mizoguchi. In his film, Rivette conjoins Eastern and Western theater, the theatrical scene and the pictorial tableau, to conceive of a cinema founded on the Diderotian notion of tableau. In *La Religieuse* Rivette explores the parameters of the tableau—moving from novel, to the theatrical scene, to the pictorial tableau—in full circle to redefine the theatricality of Diderot's novel in his film. In its capacity to mix art forms, *La Religieuse* respects what Rivette has described as the “impure nature” of cinema itself:

It [Cinema] is an impure art, complex, between the novel, the theater, painting, music, dance, etc., and it is normal that in this indeterminate place from within the middle of the traditional arts, that we would want to look sometimes in this direction, or in that direction [. . .]. (Conférence de presse n.pag.)

Rivette's exploration of theatricality through the tableau in *Religieuse* lays the foundation for his later film *Belle Noiseuse* (1991), an adaptation of Balzac's novel that features painting in its plot. Similar to the Balzacian painter Eduard Frenhofer, Rivette returns to the canvas after having abandoned it for a lengthy period in order to focus on the process of artistic production. Rivette's observation that “There are two kinds of filmmakers, those for whom painting serves as a departure point, and those who arrive there following

their journey” reveals his own relation to the tableau, which serves him both as a departure point and as a point of return (qtd. in Aumont 217).

### **De-contextualizing the Tableaux: The Rhetorical Moment of Pre-May ‘68**

As we have seen, the suicide of Suzanne Simonin is offered to the spectator as a spectacle of sacrifice. Her body is presented to the audience as the conspicuous object of an institutional rape, sacrificed beneath the dual blades of a sadistic bourgeois morality and its transgressive “inversion.” The emblematic tableau of her sacrifice was brandished by French students and intellectuals as the prologue to both the sexual and political liberation of May ‘68. The pre-revolutionary corps of May ‘68 constructed itself beneath the banner of a perceptual and sexual liberation that was seen as synonymous with political liberation, promising the only viable alternative to the chaste spectacle of national identity and history fabricated under Maréchal Pétain and consecrated under Gaullism. The emblematic tableau of her institutional rape, a metonymic substitute for the film text, is brandished by the French academy, the students, and the press as a revolutionary insignia, thereby establishing a structural parallel between the legendary rape of Lucretia, which had served as the prologue to Rome’s liberation, and its contemporary filmic equivalent in *La Religieuse* to instate the current moment as also a pre-revolutionary one.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it is precisely the instatement of this pre-revolutionary trope of rape that precipitated the total ban that Charles de Gaulle’s government placed on the film, rather than the film’s depiction of anti-clericalism or lesbianism as is generally supposed. The nature of the film’s content, in itself, could never have caused either state censorship or national scandal. Yet the sentiments expressed by the director of the Sureté Nationale Maurice Grimaud, the head police official in France at the time,

seem indicative of the mood of the Gaullist government, cautioning the censors that scenes of public disorder might break out if *La Religieuse* were released (Stein 132).

Following the ban on the film, a "Free the Nun" tour of French universities began at Rennes, with Chabrol and Rivette addressing student assemblies (Stein 133). Thierry Jousse notes that the ban itself served as a sign announcing the events of May '68 (24). The accuracy of his acute observation is testified to by the unfolding of events. The censors, representing the Gaullist state, unwittingly reproduced the institutional rape of the fictional character Suzanne Simonin by displacing it onto the filmic body of *La Religieuse*. Thus, the double rape transacted across the bodies of both the fictional character and the film itself would consequently serve the intelligentsia, the press, and the academy as a prologue for their revolutionary outcry.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> My discussion also relies on Dudley Andrew's discussion of "Adaptation" in *Film Theory and Criticism* (New York: Oxford, 1999). Andrew characterizes the relationship between Robert Bresson's film adaptation *The Diary of a Country Priest* and Georges Bernanos's novel in terms of André Bazin's metaphor of a flashlight illuminating the original artwork.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Fried attributes the enormous popularity of Jean-Baptiste Greuze during the mid-eighteenth century to the capacity of his tableaux to completely exclude the beholder: "Those aspects of Greuze's art traditionally perceived as appealing most egregiously to the beholder functioned largely to neutralize the latter's presence. And because his presence was neutralized in that way, the beholder was held and moved by Greuze's paintings as by the work of no other artist of his time" (69).

<sup>3</sup> As Martin Harrison notes in *The Language of the Theater* (New York: Routledge, 1998), curtains and hanging fabrics were used in secular Western European theater from the point when they left the confines of the church in the 12<sup>th</sup> century: "Let Paradise be set up in a somewhat lofty place; let there be put about it curtains and silken hangings, at such an height that those persons that shall be in Paradise can be seen from the shoulders upward" (70). This is a translation of a stage direction taken from the 12<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Norman *Jeu d'Adam*, which was probably composed by a priest for performance against a church façade.

<sup>4</sup> Jay Caplan's brilliant analysis of *La Religieuse* in *Framed Narratives: Diderot's Genealogy of the Beholder* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1985) relies on the notion of dialogicism theorized by M. M. Bakhtin: "The dialogical orientation is obviously a characteristic phenomenon of all discourse [. . .]. Discourse comes upon the discourse of the other on all roads that lead to its object, and it cannot but enter into intense and lively interaction with it. Only the mythical and totally alone Adam, approaching a virgin and still unspoken world with the very first discourse, could really avoid altogether this mutual orientation with respect to the discourse of the other, that occurs on the way to the object" (qtd. in Caplan 6). Caplan transposes Bakhtin's argument into the area of aesthetic experience to argue that it is not only socially determined but dialogic, that it entails discursive interaction. For Caplan, aesthetic response is a "dialogic" gesture that addresses both previous discourses about the same topic, but the anticipated responses of an interlocutor.

<sup>5</sup> Angela Dalle Vacche uses the metaphor of rape to describe Eric Rohmer's approach to the adaptation of Heinrich von Kleist's novella. The plot of both Rohmer's film and novella centers on the rape of the Marquise by a handsome Russian count, while she is asleep under the effects of a potion. I shift the terms of the metaphor, characterizing Rivette's approach to the adaptation of Diderot's novel in terms of temptation, seduction, and possession. Such terms describe not only Rivette's approach to adaptation, in my view, but also the relation of Mme. de Chelle to Suzanne Simonin, the Nun.

<sup>6</sup> Seami Motokiyo (1363-1444 A.D.) is the author of *Works*, which are treatises designed for the instruction of his pupils. He is generally considered to be the father of the contemporary Nô theater. The treatises, according to Arthur Waley in *The Nô Plays of Japan* (New York: Grove Press, 1911), contain injunctions of secrecy, as all instruction was regarded as a mystic initiation. Here, Seami describes the chant: "(My) chanting at the beginning of *Ukai* is closely modeled on Kwanami's style,—the words lightly spoken on the ends of the lips. The chanting in this play from beginning to end is all in the vehement mode" (qtd. in Waley 24). Both in its appeal to a form of mystic initiation rite and to a form of the chant, Seami's treatise on Nô theater aligns itself with Rivette's theatrical sensibility.

<sup>7</sup> A special research group was also formed at that time in association with *Cahiers Renaud-Barrault*, which would provide a series of lectures and conferences, which would include studies of Chinese, Tibetan, Persian, Indonesian and Hittite theaters. The proceeds of the conference were to be published by the National Center of Scientific Research (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique).

<sup>8</sup> Rivette confided in a personal interview that he viewed Paul Claudel, Jean Genet, and Samuel Beckett as the most important dramaturges in the twentieth century.

<sup>9</sup> In *Empire of Signs* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), Barthes specifically discusses the mechanisms of Bunraku puppet theater in terms of the alienation effect

Brecht recommends. Barthes sees the theater as engaging three forms of the writing, which are worked out by the puppet, the person working the puppet's movements, and a second person who recites a text as the voice of the puppet. The theater achieves what Steven Ungar in *Roland Barthes* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983) terms the "self-reflexivity" that Barthes aspired to in his own writing (54). Additionally, this form of self-reflexivity attains the alienation effect, Barthes asserts, in its capacity to separate action from gesture, to show the gesture, let the action be seen, thereby exhibiting simultaneously the art and the labor (54).

<sup>10</sup> This comparison is indebted to Thomas Elsaesser who in "Rivette and the End of Cinema," *Sight and Sound* 1.12 (1991/2), examines Rivette's *La Belle Noiseuse* (1991) as the transformation of Honoré de Balzac's classical, readerly short story into an allegorical, writerly text.

<sup>11</sup> Stephanie Jed in *Chaste Thinking* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) traces the "logic of chaste thinking" to its origins in the legend of the rape of Lucretia, which was reproduced in Coluccio Salutati's *Declamatio Lucretiae* in the second half of the fifteenth century in northeastern Italy. I will attempt to summarize here Livy's codification of the legend of Lucretia in *The Early History of Rome* to which Jed refers (Jed 9-10). One night, during the siege of Ardea (509 B.C.) the noble Roman soldiers, in the midst of their eating and drinking festivities, argue over which of their wives is most praiseworthy. The husband of Lucretia persuades the others to go and check on their wives that very night to see whether they have remained faithful or not during their husbands' anticipated absence. All of the wives are found to be unfaithful except for Lucretia, who is found spinning and who thus, wins the chastity contest.

Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the tyrant, is so impressed by the spectacle of Lucretia's chastity on the night of the husbands' visit that he resolves to return and rape her. A few days later, he visits Lucretia's house alone. She welcomes him graciously and provides him with a room for the night. Later that night, he steals into Lucretia's room with his sword drawn and attempts to seduce her. When he finds her unmoved by his pleas, Tarquin threatens to kill her and to then place a murdered servant beside her in bed, claiming that he has discovered them in adultery. Fearing this threat to her reputation, Lucretia yields, and Sextus enjoys her and then, leaves.

Lucretia summons her father and husband, who arrive accompanied by Lucius Junius Brutus, the ancestor of Marcus Brutus, Caesar's assassin. Although her kinsmen try to convince her that although her body was violated, her mind remains chaste, Lucretia insists that she must kill herself as proof of her efforts to preserve her chastity. While Lucretia's kinsmen are paralyzed with grief and tears by her suicide, Brutus takes the knife from her breast and swears by it that he will vindicate her honor by expelling the Tarquins, thereby liberating the Romans from their suffering under tyranny. Lucretia's body is transported to the forum, where Brutus urges the populace to help him make good on his word. After liberating Rome from tyranny, Brutus founds the institutions of the Roman Republic and is hailed as a hero. He becomes the consul of Rome (Jed 9-10).

Jed perceptively points to the significance of the moment in which Brutus discovers the Romans grieving over the fate of Lucetia, the moment in which he



castigates them for their tears and urges them to take up arms instead of weeping (10). Jed offers her perspective on this legend that serves as a master narrative: "The humanistic tradition that has transmitted the legend of the rape of Lucretia has performed a similar function of isolating the meaning of Lucretia's rape from the material circumstances in which interpretation takes place each time this rape is reproduced. In this way, the rape of Lucretia has acquired a universal meaning divorced from historical conditions; in every age and place, it always serves the same function, as a prologue to liberty" (12). Jed points out that the rape of Lucretia has come to serve as the necessary prologue to the act of political liberation, and that consequently, it is essential to identify the tropes of chaste thinking, which persistently reappear in contemporary narratives. Jed's insights seem pertinent to our discussion of *La Religieuse*, which was released in France at such a pre-revolutionary moment, and Diderot's novel, which was written in the years preceding the French Revolution of 1789.

CHAPTER 4  
AESCHYLUS, ARTAUD, AND THE ABSURD:  
THE POST-68 REVERIE OF *OUT 1: NOLI ME TANGERE*

In the anguished, catastrophic times we live in,  
we feel an urgent need for theatre that is not  
overshadowed by events, but arouses deep echoes  
within us and rises above our unsettled period.

— Antonin Artaud 1933; “Theatre and Cruelty”

Following the experience of *La Religieuse*, Rivette felt compelled to completely alter his course, justifying his decision with these remarks: “I wasn’t very satisfied with *La Religieuse*. I had the feeling of taking off in a direction that wasn’t my own. The shooting had been difficult and ultimately not very interesting (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 133). Rivette admits that he found the actual filming of *La Religieuse* tedious: “I was bored, extremely bored, and in such a way that, in my opinion, it hurt the film. I knew Diderot’s text, which I had so carefully adapted, by heart” (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 133). Close to thirteen hours, *Out 1: Noli me tangere* (1970-71) premiered on September 9-10, 1971, at the Maison de la Culture in Le Havre. Attended by a small group of roughly three hundred spectators, this exceptional weekend event, which was characterized by one reviewer for *Le Monde* as a “Voyage Beyond Cinema” (“Voyage au-delà du cinema”), would be the film’s only public projection (“Out 1” n.pag.). *Out 1* represents the culmination of Rivette’s effort, which began with *L’Amour Fou* (1967-68), to break from the strictures of narrative form, from the inflexibility imposed by a script, and from the acting style required by rigid adherence to the script. Rivette found

inspiration in the style of Jean Renoir, who, in his estimation, had created “a cinema that doesn’t impose anything, but instead tries to suggest things and permits them to happen, where there is a dialogue at every level, with the actors, with the situation, with the people that one meets, where the fact of shooting the film becomes part of the film itself” (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 133).<sup>1</sup> André Labarthe compares the stylistic change in Rivette’s work following *La Religieuse* to the “Copernican revolution,” where “the shooting style (*un tournage*) would turn (*tournerait*) as the earth around the sun, without beginning or end” (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 134). Labarthe’s metaphorical characterization is based on Rivette’s own remarks to Renoir during the filming of *Jean Renoir le Patron*, when, according to Labarthe, he discovered a new vision of filmmaking based on that of the aging director. Jacques Aumont has remarked that if Renoir merited the status of “*le Patron*” (the patron) for his younger colleague Rivette, it was not because of his deep focus style or his mobile camera, but because of his rapport with the actors of his films (230).<sup>2</sup> In Renoir’s films, the actor remains at the center of his conception of the cinema. Renoir did not keep his actors reined in, as Aumont observes, but allowed them the freedom to make mistakes and to improvise on the set (230). Aumont suggests that if Renoir established a give-and-take relation with his actors, it is because the actor remained the privileged means of obtaining what Renoir thought to be the goal of the cinema—a form of truth (230). Rivette’s relationship with his actors would shift significantly following his encounter with Renoir and would become central to the experimental style of *Out 1*.

Rivette’s stylistic revolution coincides not only with the completion of his documentary on Renoir but also with the cultural revolution in France following the

events of May 1968. Testifying to the radical moment of cultural change, *Out 1* surpasses the boundaries of narrative, script, and acting style, which Rivette felt had constrained him during the filming of *La Religieuse*, to enter into a new dimension in filmmaking. Labarthe observes that Rivette still saw his life and his filmmaking as two separate things when he made *Paris nous appartient* and *La Religieuse*:

He entered a shoot as one enters monastic orders. During the filming of *Renoir le Patron*, he understood that there is no “before and after” a shoot, that there is no boundary between “before and behind” the camera: there is the filming, certainly, but as the earth around the sun. (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 136)

In *Out 1*, Rivette moves away from classical theater and the Italian Renaissance stage that largely determines the mise-en-scène of both *Paris nous appartient* and *La Religieuse*. Rivette refuses the introspective form of the static tableau to adopt an exteriorized performance style in *Out 1*, which is based on French avant-garde theater aesthetics and the 1960s European and American experimental theater.

The title of the film *Out 1: Noli me tangere* whose ethic, Rivette claims, was based on “the abandonment of limits, a refusal of traditional boundaries” is paradoxically inspired by a tableau by Giotto entitled *La Résurrection (Noli me tangere)*, 1303-06 (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 137). Michel Delahaye explains the meaning of the tableau, which depicts the resurrected Christ, departing from the center of the landscape (qtd. in Frappat 21). He is looking back at a woman who is kneeling with her arms outstretched to him. Delahaye explains that the woman wants to approach him as had everyone when he was still alive, those who knew him “in the flesh” (qtd. in Frappat 21). The word “flesh” (*chair*) in this context, as Delahaye explains, means the entire being, both body and soul (qtd. in Frappat 21). What no longer appears in the flesh is no longer tactile; one

can no longer attain it or touch it. Delahaye reminds us that the word “*toucher*” (to touch) can be connected through association with “*touchant*” (touching) (qtd. in Frappat 21). Thus, Christ’s injunction must be read both literally, “I am not here in the flesh; so, do not try to touch me” and figuratively, “Do not try to move me or to detain me; I must leave.”

Giotto’s tableau speaks implicitly to the status of the body both at the theater and at the cinema. In the theater, the body appears before the spectator “in the flesh”; whereas, in the cinema, the body is no longer tactile, as it is an image. The filmic spectator, like the suppliant before Christ, can no longer attain it or touch it. Beyond this implicit commentary on the status of the body in the two arts, Giotto’s tableau might also propose an ethics of reading available for *Out 1*: In viewing this film, do not try to detain or to tie down meaning because, by its very nature, it is always fleeing before us. In my own reading of *Out 1*, I am assuming the role of the woman suppliant before the spectral moving image, which appears before me as real or “in the flesh.” Respecting the film’s injunction, I do not, however, attempt to secure a coherent meaning or to tie down the significance of filmic signifiers, for it is precisely the intention of the film to resist this. Instead, I propose a glossary of terms, which call attention to those places, personages, ideas that directly bear on our discussion of the film and its theatricality. The glossary is alphabetized, yet it stops short of providing a systematic, complete, ordered compendium of terms. In proposing such a partial schema, I must call upon Rivette who throughout this film invokes order and systematicity through allusions to schemes transcribed in words, letters, charts, and graphs. While such floating signifiers seem to

allude to an encrypted code in the film, they ultimately frustrate all attempts to achieve a fixed, definitive meaning or accomplish a definitive mapping of the text.

### A: Aeschylus

*Out 1* is loosely based on the story of two theater groups that are both staging plays by the Greek dramatist Aeschylus. One group is directed by Thomas (Michael Lonsdale) and is rehearsing *Prometheus Bound*, while the collective is rehearsing *Seven Against Thebes*.<sup>3</sup> Why does Rivette choose to open his film with Aeschylus? The Greek dramatist seems an unlikely choice, for as William Matheson points out, Aeschylus has had an unhappy fate in France (20). Matheson conjectures that perhaps this was due to the cultural egocentricity of France, a nation less likely to look beyond the borders of its own strong literary tradition (20). Although the history of Aeschylus in France, as Matheson indicates, has largely been a history of neglect, the most notable exceptions are Victor Hugo, Paul Claudel, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Ariane Mnouchkine's 1990 production at Théâtre de Soleil (13).<sup>4</sup> Here, Hugo describes Aeschylus:

Aeschylus is magnificent and formidable; it is as though one could see a frown above the sun. . . . He is rude, abrupt, excessive . . . almost ferocious . . . Aeschylus is the ancient mystery made man; something like a pagan prophet. His work, if we had all of it, would be a sort of Greek bible . . . hard like a rock, tumultuous like foam, full of steep slopes, of torrents and precipices, and so gigantic that, at times, it resembles a mountain. (qtd. in Matheson 16)

In the first episode of *Out 1*, the two theater troupes are attempting to capture the Aeschylus envisioned by Hugo. Entitled "de Lili à Thomas," Rivette opens this episode with Lili and the collective, who are rehearsing *Seven Against Thebes*. Pulsating rhythms of primitive drumbeats introduce us to the scene, transporting us to a primordial moment. Suddenly, the sound tape is switched off, and the actors return to reciting random

passages from their script, accompanied by an intermittent flute refrain. In this manner, Rivette moves from the distant past tense of Aeschylus to the present tense of the film shoot. The Aeschylean script is timeless; it holds the potential for innumerable stage productions, those that have previously occurred, and those that will occur. The present tense of the filming, however, only takes place once, during the time of the film shoot. The actors and actresses improvise for the camera, and Rivette records them. As Hélène Deschamps points out in her discussion of the filmed theater rehearsals in *L'Amour fou*, the film take mirrors the theatrical scene, as each is completely unique and located irredeemably in the present (8). Yet as the film's title "*Out 1*" reminds us, the "out take" is positioned "outside" of the time of the production. It is neither in the present (as the take in process) nor in the past (as the finished product), for it is cut out of the final film and, thus, never viewed by the audience. In *Out 1* Rivette problematizes this practice, however, by reusing his out takes within the final film. Black and white out takes serve as framing devices, which introduce the upcoming episode by recapitulating and restating past occurrences, while alluding to the unexplored possibilities and different perspectives contained within each one. The title "*Out 1*" underscores a decisive difference between the two art forms: in the cinema, montage can only occur after the act of filming; whereas, at the theater, montage must occur before the play's production.

### **A: Artaud**

Rivette rejoins the theater of Antonin Artaud through ancient traditions—esoteric, primitive, mythic—in an attempt to rediscover the magic and mystery of the everyday world. *Out 1* is indebted to Artaud's "theater of cruelty," in its demand for the destruction of dramatic character and especially in its insistence on a theater that would

place the spectator on stage. During the 1930s, Artaud had insisted on a theater that would invert the authority of the text, placing the spectator on stage alongside of the actors and giving precedence to *mise-en-scène*. In the *Theater and Its Double*, Artaud searched for a theatrical language that would privilege movement as opposed to mimesis, spectacle as opposed to meaning, and vision rather than voice (Oswald xiv). Pointing to the connection between Artaud and Rivette, Jonathan Rosenbaum has observed that, “Like Artaud, Rivette has created a ‘nontheological space’ (Derrida), which admits the tyranny of neither text nor auteur. It is a space in which the actor’s grammar of gesture and voice may play creatively without impediment” (*Phantom* 19). He sought to regenerate theater through the invention of a metaphysical language of incantation, which would engage the spectator as a participant. The post-May ‘68 generation regarded *Theater and Its Double* as a visionary work that would provide an entirely new conception of the theater. Rivette’s transposition of Artaud’s theatrical language of space in *Out 1* not only reflects the *zeitgeist* of the time but also points ahead to postmodern preoccupations with process, participation, and performance, rather than the authoritative and finished work of art.

Like Sartre, Artaud sought to restore to the theater its ritual dimension to liberate it from its servitude to psychology. He found in the classical repertoire of Dullin’s theater *l’Atelier* the means to achieve this end.<sup>5</sup> Artaud subsequently became an adapter of the Greek dramatists, preferring Seneca to Aeschylus. He prefaces his adaptation of Seneca’s *Thyestes* with this prospectus:

All the Great Myths of the Past dissimulate pure forces. They were only invented to make those forces durable and manifest. And outside their scholarly and literary casing, Antonin Artaud wants to attempt, by means of an adaptation of a Mythic tragedy, to express their natural forces on the



stage and thus to deliver the theater to its true goal and calling. (qtd. in Sellin 36)

In an interview with James Monaco, Rivette confided that he chose *Seven Against Thebes* not only for its mythic resonance, but because “it was distant from us, a play practically unplayable, because practically all that is said in the text does not concern us, so it was purely a text with which to do vocal exercises, movements, and so on” (323). Aeschylus’ text allows the members of Lili’s troupe to disengage its archaic poetry from meaning and thereby, restore to film the ritual dimension associated with theater. During the rehearsal, sounds become important in themselves, reflecting Artaud’s belief that sounds should not be understood solely as the physical outcome of a movement or an action (Greene 103). Rivette films members of Lili’s troupe as they enact and comment on the vocal modulations of singing, screaming, and chanting the lines of their script:

On fait un cri ou on fait la note?/Do we cry out or hit the note?  
 On crie encore./We’re still crying out.  
 [. . .] screams  
 On le chante trop/We’re chanting the line too much.  
 Oui. Il faut que cela soit moche./ Yes. It really has to be gross.  
 [. . .] screams  
 C’est moche?/Is it gross?  
 C’est pas assez grec./Yes but it’s not Greek enough.

The troupe that is simultaneously directed by Lili and by Rivette attempts to restore to both the stage and screen the incantatory rhythm of a universal language.

The filmed rehearsals of Aeschylus may be as close as anyone in film has come to Artaud’s ideal. They give form to Artaud’s imaginary productions where, “Rhythmic repetitions of syllables and particular modulations of the voice” can produce “a more or less hallucinatory state [thereby] impelling the sensibility and mind alike to a kind of organic alteration” (qtd. in Plunka 26). One member of Thomas’ troupe offers this



Figure 4.1. Lili's group doing voice exercises for *Seven Against Thebes, Out 1*.

reflection on vocal repetition and the dissolution of meaning:

I pronounced the word "hope" without giving it any meaning; I was pronouncing it as though it didn't belong to me, as though it were someone else's, I mean an interior voice, as though I were repeating it meaninglessly, and then, little by little, I tried to give it meaning by repeating it to others.

The actors in Thomas' ensemble shift gradually from speaking in syllables (*syllabisation*) to the recitation of the alphabet. In "de Lili à Thomas," Rivette weaves back and forth between the rehearsals of two theater troupes directed by Lili and Thomas. The spectator, like the members of each troupe, is witness to the outburst of music, voice, and cry, and thus, must question the status of the meaningful, spoken word. The initial episode of *Out*

*I* tears open the space between sound and sense, between theatrical and cinematic representation.

Artaud's radical approach to theater immediately attracted Julian Beck and Judith Malina, who used Artaudian theory to create an avant-garde performance theater, The Living Theatre. According to Arnold Aronson, the work that the Living Theatre produced in its first few seasons reflected Artaud's emphasis on poetic language as a revolutionary means to reinvent the theater and as "a utopian tool that provided a direct connection to the subconscious" (55). The Becks believed that poetic language would allow them to achieve a theater "as a place of intense experience, half dream, half ritual, in which the spectator approaches something of a vision of self-understanding, going past the conscious to the unconscious, to an understanding of the nature of all things [. . .]" (qtd. in Aronson 55). Their exploration of the rhythm and sound of language as a means to surpass the superficial meaning of words recalls Artaud, whose formulations provide the basis for Rivette's work on sound in *Out 1*. Another significant motif that characterized the early work of the Living Theatre was the meta-theatrical structure of a play within a play or a play commenting on its own theatricality (Aronson 54). Although the Living Theater was not the first troupe to give precedence to the meta-theatrical element of drama, Beck revolutionized the approach, using it to shock the audience, "to awaken them from their passive slumber, to provoke them into attention" (qtd. in Aronson 55). Through reflexive theatrical strategies, the Becks sought to return to the mystical, ritualistic purpose of the theater. Rivette certainly shared this vision of drama, citing plays in his films that reflexively comment on their own theatricality. The filmed

theater rehearsals in *Paris nous appartient* and *Out 1* force our attention to the theatrical codes that inflect both the production of the play and the film.

The premiere performance of *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*, the work prepared by the Becks for the American Center for Students and Artists, was presented on October 26, 1964. The play's title was invented by Malina and was based on the Eleusian "mysteries" of ancient Greece. She confessed that the play drew its inspiration from a dream she had had after having read Artaud (Tytell 199). In his essay "Storming the Barricades," Beck expresses his belief that the Grecian "mysteries" held possibilities for a new theater that would aid the audience to become "a congregation led by priests, a choral ecstasy of reading and response, dance, seeking transcendence, a way out and up, the vertical thrust, seeking a state of awareness that surpasses mere conscious being and brings you closer to God" (qtd. in Tytell 199). Part I of the *Mysteries* began with an actor onstage in rigid military posture who remained silent for several minutes. Such wordless defiance, which Aronson describes as "an Artaudian confrontation of the physical performer and the spectator" was designed to shock the audience into a new awareness (75). Following this silent assault, actors jogged down the aisles of the theater and burst into a mime routine based on bed-making and floor-cleaning routines. Other performers began to recite a "Dollar Poem," which Aronson describes as an abstract poem derived from the words and numbers printed on a dollar bill (70-71). The entire scene ended with a blackout followed by a Hindu chant, which served as a meditative and musical means to integrate the community of actors and the audience. The implicit political problem posed by *Mysteries*, as Monique Borie stresses, was how to change the world, while the response given was of a mythical and magical order (161). The eloquence of silence and

the expressiveness of the body that characterized Living Theatre performances also distinguish those of *Out 1*. Short sung passages, verses of poetry, improvised recitations serve Rivette's characters as a protective incantation that interconnects them to each other and to the audience. In *Out 1*, the strangely menacing aspect of everyday occurrences is counterbalanced by the ceremonial use of language in song and in recitation.

### C: Chorus

In Aeschylean drama, the Chorus is composed of multiple actors whose primary role is to speak and to sing, as well as to reflect the rhythm of Aeschylus' poetry. Members of the Chorus encircle the principal characters of the drama; their sung and spoken incantations serve to echo the dispositions, actions, and passions of the central characters. Their ritual recitations build gradually to a feverish, bacchic frenzy, a primitivism, where dance, gesture, and movement become integral to the drama (Matheson 154). The rhythm of Aeschylean poetry, which the Chorus accentuates in a succession of long and short intonations, is at least as important as the words themselves. Indeed, Claudel describes the Aeschylean chorus as a "living harp" (155). Each Aeschylus play staged in *Out 1* originally required a Chorus: The Chorus of Oceanides orchestrates the action of *Prometheus Bound*, as the Chorus of the Theban Women reflects the dramatic action in *Seven Against Thebes*. The filmed rehearsals of *Out 1* present delicate slivers of Aeschylus' plays in piecemeal. In this manner, Rivette strips Aeschylean verse of its dramatic signification and divests the actors' gestures and movements of significance. What remains in the film are empty signs—words, gestures, movements—removed from their Aeschylean context, that stand in the present tense of

the film as the signs of residue theatricality, a theatrical remainder with meaning factored out.

In *Out 1*, the filmed rehearsals not only present choral exercises but also function within the film, as would a Chorus. Both theater groups rehearse inside closed rooms and thus, remain insulated from the open space of the city, which is associated with profilmic performance. Their mode of address, which is sung or spoken recitation, offsets that of those characters whose dramas unfold within the sidewalk cafés, bookstores, side streets, *chambres de bonne*, which all remain spatially connected to the cityscape through passageways such as an open doorway, a bridge, or a French window. The Chorus in *Out 1* remains peripheral to the space of the city, where it serves as a formal theatrical element and a primitive force that affirms, intones, and rhythmically recites Aeschylean verse. Its intermittent appearance allows for an occasional pause in the film's progression to place emphasis on theatrical ritual through its arcane use of words, gesture, and sounds.

Rivette fuses into the Greek quality of the Chorus heterogeneous elements from Japanese Nô theater, which were *en germe* in *La Religieuse*. As Matheson point out, the Chorus is one of the most important bridges that, across continents and ages, link the Japanese and Greek theaters (156). For Rivette, there is no strict line of demarcation between Japanese Nô and Athenian drama. Thus, the Chorus in *Out 1* becomes instrumental as well as vocal, listening and interpreting, elaborating, meditating, and amplifying. The flute common to the Nô orchestra frequently reappears during rehearsals. Seami instructs his pupils: “[. . .] the flute should play for a while in order to quiet the audience and put them in the right mood. When the dancing and singing has

begun the flute-player must listen to the actor's voice, follow its rhythm and, as it were, "shadow" it" (qtd. in Waley 29). Drums often accompanied the flute, which was to produce a hypnotic effect in the audience during the Nô performance. Both flutes and drums provide background to the movements and recitation of the filmed rehearsals; however, recorded sound effects of the ocean surf and seagulls are used as well.

Artaud advocated using music produced by ancient and modern instruments to supplement the incantatory rhythms of language. Like Rivette, Artaud was also drawn to Eastern theater because it offered a language of *mise-en-scène*, a pure language of *décor* prior to words. For Artaud, Eastern theater offered an alternative to both the psychological and political drama. He argues:

It [theatre] is not aimed at solving social or psychological conflicts, to serve as a battleground for moral passions, but to express objectively secret truths, to bring out in active gestures those elements of truth hidden under forms in their encounters with Becoming. To do that, to link theatre with expressive form potential, with everything in the way of gestures, sound, colours, movement, is to return it to its original purpose, to restore it to a religious, metaphysical position, to reconcile it with the universal. (122)

Artaud found in Balinese theater a plastic and visceral means of expression, "which emerges through the maze of gestures, postures, airborne cries" (88). He felt that the gestural metaphysics of the Balinese theater used in combination with music could create a sense of magic that would reach the unconscious (Plunka 29). Rivette had borrowed the ritualistic elements of Eastern theater for his film *La Religieuse*; however, they take on new dimensions in *Out 1* where they are fused into the ceremonial pageantry of the Aeschylean Chorus. In *Out 1*, the Chorus offers the actors and the audience a sonorous ritual, a chant that will exceed the menacing world of signs that surround them.

## C: Complot/Conspiracy

The myth of the criminal conspiracy that had spread through the textual system of *Paris nous appartient* resurfaces in *Out 1* in the guise of a utopian political group, the eponymous *L'Histoire des Treize* (*The Thirteen*). Balzac describes the Thirteen in the prologue to his novel:

In the Paris of the Empire there were found Thirteen men equally impressed with the same idea, equally endowed with energy enough to keep them true to it, while among themselves they were loyal enough to keep faith even when their interests chanced to clash. They were strong enough to set themselves above all laws; bold enough to shrink from no enterprise; and lucky enough to succeed in nearly everything that they undertook. [...] Criminals they doubtless were, yet none the less were they all remarkable for some one of the virtues which go to the making of great men, and their numbers were filled up only from among picked recruits. Finally, that nothing should be lacking to complete the dark, mysterious romance of their history, nobody to this day knows who they were. (11)

The conspiratorial plots that afflicted the characters of *Paris nous appartient* reemerge in *Out 1* to again become the common pursuit of criminal, dramaturge, and filmmaker. In this sense, Philip's paranoid remark, "The real masters are hidden and govern in secret. They have no names" must be read not only as a reference to his own participatory role in the "plot" scripted by Rivette, but as an intertextual reference to the conspiratorial collective of Balzac's *Les Treize*, which extends to the roles of actors and actresses in *Out 1*: Michèle Moretti in the role of Lili, who is performing *Seven Against Thebes* with her collective; Michel Lonsdale as the director Thomas who is rehearsing *Prometheus*; Bernadette Lafonte in the role of Sarah, a novelist who lives in a haunted villa by the sea; Bulle Ogier in her double roles as Pauline, the wife of the missing Igor, and Emilie, who runs a hippie boutique *l'Angle du hasard* (*Crossroads of Chance*); Juliet Berto as



Frédérique who hustles at the Bastille; Françoise Fabian as the lawyer Lucie de Graf; Jacques Doniol-Valcroze as Etienne, a businessman who plays chess; Eric Rohmer who passionately discusses Balzac; and Jean-Pierre Léaud in the role of Colin, who plays the harmonica in cafés for money, Jean-François Stévenin, who plays “Marlon” Brando, and Michel Berto, who plays Frédérique’s accomplice Honeymoon.

The Balzacian underworld resurfaces in *Out 1* through clandestine forms of communication, through its private language, and its web-like organization. In his effort to crack the code to the conspiratorial web at work around him, Colin rummages through his collection of novels and falls upon *Les Treize*. He scrawls the number “13” on the blackboard alongside the author’s name “Balzac.” An extreme close-up frontally frames the face of Jean-Pierre Léaud/Colin; his position as a student at the blackboard and his obsessive engagement with Balzac recall the actor’s earlier role in François Truffaut’s New Wave classic *400 Blows* (*Les Quatre Cent Coups*). In this film, Léaud played the adolescent Antoine Doinel, who was so fanatically obsessed with Balzac that to pay tribute to the French author he lit candles in his bedroom, which ultimately caught fire, condemning him to the wrath of his parents. The character’s name “Colin” opens up yet another field of intertextual references available only to the initiated, offering a specific reference to the character Jacques Collin who appears in Balzac’s *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, in which the myth of the criminal conspiracy is fully developed. Like Balzac’s character Jacques Collin, Rivette’s character Colin is also a criminal, a thief, of sorts. Colin makes his initial appearance in *Out 1* careening through sidewalk cafés, while attempting to pass himself off as a deaf-mute. The modulations of his harmonica replace words, as he moves from table to table passing out cards to solicit donations from

the clientele. Colin/Collin appears later at the office of Eric Rohmer, who plays a Balzac scholar, who responds to the deaf-mute's written note, "Who are the Thirteen?" Claiming to lip-read Rohmer's academic explanation, Colin/Collin simply nods when Rohmer affirms: "What I admire most in Balzac is the conspiracy, the occult, which in my opinion is at the heart of his work. [ . . . ] The goal of these characters is to replace the permanent conspiracy of evil with a sort of conspiracy for good."

The criminal conspiracy extends to Frédérique (Juliet Berto), who like Colin, lives by hustling at local cafés. She engages one group of Black men at a café, promising them that she will accompany them to Africa, while insisting that they give her money up front for her daughter. Before leaving the café, one guy wisecracks that they will be leaving "on our honeymoon." The word "honeymoon" changes significance in the following scene, when it becomes linked to a character's name "Honeymoon," a gay friend of Frédérique to whom she confesses her crime in a bar. In this manner, the film creates its own private language made up of signifiers that shift in meaning from scene to scene, establishing a textual network of significance that is based on a logic/illogic made available only to the initiated. Frédérique and Honeymoon pursue the thread of criminality within another café, where they spot two men seated in the back attempting to sell porn under the cover of religious brochures. Assuming the role of religious reformer, Frédérique approaches them and then, blackmails them by threatening to expose their charade to the café management. The double conspiracies (*complots*) that animate this scene invoke a nineteenth-century notion of theatricality, which relies on the Balzacian construction of the criminal as actor. Cafés invite criminality in *Out 1*; characters move

insidiously from one role to the next, in the same way that signifiers shift from one signified to the next in the film.

## G: Grotowski

Rivette borrows Grotowskian theater strategies *Out 1* to achieve confrontation with myth rather than identification through it. In his 1967 essay “Towards a Poor Theatre,” Grotowski claims that group identification with myth is no longer possible, for the “common sky” of belief no longer exists (33). Rather than the traditional mythic forms that subtended Sartrean dramaturgy, in Grotowski’s Laboratory Theater, myth functions as a taboo (33). Grotowski affirms:

Only myth—incarnate in the fact of the actor, in his living organism—can function as a taboo. The violation of the living organism, the exposure carried to outrageous excess, returns us to a concrete mythical situation, an experience of common human truth. (33)

Grotowski acknowledges the importance of myth as a bridge to the past that connects each individual to “something larger—a greater history than our own personal one—an interindividual and interpersonal history” (qtd. in Croyden 83). Yet the “situation,” in the Sartrean sense, is no longer available to the spectator in the Grotowskian theater; it has metamorphosed into what Grotowski terms “the brutal moment” where “we strip ourselves and touch an extraordinarily intimate layer, exposing it,” so that finally, “the life-mask cracks and falls away” (33). The Sartrean situationist theater characterized by its “austere, moral, mythic, and ceremonial aspect” (“Myth” 42) provides the backdrop against which Grotowski forges a theater where the laws of time, gravity, and natural logic have been suspended. Ludwik Flaszen, literary adviser of the Polish Laboratory Theater, describes the ensemble’s 1966 premiere at Théâtre des Nations in terms that

reflect its Sartrean lineage, viewing it as “a collective ritual that liberates or provokes an existential shock” (qtd. in Temkine 22). Both Grotowski and Rivette absorbed Sartre’s lessons in regard to mythic drama and used them as their point of departure. In *Out 1*, Rivette uses Grotowskian strategies to achieve a confrontation with ritual, rather than identification through it, as he was aware of film’s “true potential that is released through opposing these rites, a force that bursts apart yet remains vaulted shut in tragedy and in death (my translation, qtd. in Collet 66).

Rivette mobile camera encircles the performers of Thomas’ troupe, whose chanting, cries, barks, and groans are interspersed with scattered citations from *Prometheus*. An undulating camera mimics their voices. Rivette stages the sequence so that the spectator’s relation to the actors is continually shifting. Sometimes the camera gazes down at them as into an enclosed pit; sometimes he follows their movements at stage level, and sometimes the actors form into a tierlike elevation slightly above him. Like Grotowski, Rivette wishes to integrate the spectator into the performance: As the performance moves, so does the camera, and consequently, the actor is often very near. As the exercise progresses, rhythm, movement, and sound accelerate and reach a frenzied, violent pitch. One actor from Thomas’ troupe remembers the acutely physical sensations:

In the beginning, I didn’t have any ideas at all. After a while, I started off with a squirm, I felt like I was squirming. I had the feeling of being this way, on the ground slithering, then all of a sudden, my arm moved, like this, and then I held onto it, it was kind of a convulsive movement. And then, all of a sudden, a voice came to me concurrently, a kind of cry went along with it, and then, it kept happening, it spread over my whole body, and then, it settled in just my arm.

Resembling the Grotowski performance that Harold Clurman describes as “a design of fantastically contorted bodies and symbolically violent relationships,” Rivette’s filmed rehearsal remains outside the parameters of purposive action (160). The grandly pathetic action expressed in exaggerated gestures and movements of the characters in *La Religieuse* here is stripped of its pedagogical use value in rehearsal scenes where the spectator is confronted with visceral physicality of the actors’ writhing bodies. Rivette’s frontal camera that in *La Religieuse* had preserved the director’s special relation to his actors’ bodily movements and gestures, particularly those of Suzanne Simonin, is freed in *Out 1* where it becomes integral to the fluid composition of the scene.



Figure 4.2. Thomas’s group rehearsing *Prometheus Bound*, *Out 1*.



Figure 4.3. Ecstatic expressions during the rehearsal of *Prometheus Bound, Out 1*.

Rivette's film, like Grotowski's theater, draws its resources from the body. Members of Thomas' troupe reenact the vocal exercises used in the Laboratory Theater, where, as theater historian Raymonde Temkine notes, the cries and the behavior of animals often serve as the actors' source of inspiration (110). At one point, Rivette's camera tracks alongside Thomas' actors as they encircle a mannequin, which they assault, fondle, adulate, and scribble graffiti on. Later, the real body of an actress, which is carted around in a wheelbarrow by the others, replaces the mannequin. Such filmed moments reproduce the effect of a Grotowskian exercise, where, as Temkine observes, continual imaginary contact is established with someone or something in order to give the

movements meaning (110). During a rehearsal of Lili's collective, Papa-Théo holds up successive drawings of facial masks and then, contracts his own facial muscles to create a replica of each drawing. Such moments reproduce the acting style and the décor of the "poor theater," which Grotowski describes here:

[Poor theatre] gives up all conventional stage effects like lights, music, scenery, makeup, props, and spectacular effects because they are not essential. Make-up for instance, is unnecessary because the actors are trained to use their facial muscles like masks and thus actors have a variety of masks to choose from. We do not need elaborate or expensive props either. In *Akropolis* we use pieces of scrap iron, two wheelbarrows, a bathtub, and a rag doll. (qtd. in Croyden 81)

In *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook explains how the Grotowskian rehearsal forces the actor to acquire, "technical mastery over his physical and psychic means by which he can allow the barriers to drop" and consequently, allow the role to permeate him (59).

Members of Thomas' group acknowledge the psychophysical dimension of acting and discuss the potential that exists for genuinely violent acts to occur in the course of a rehearsal. Thomas remarks to the others that the associations of his body are also those of his feelings: "I can't pretend to be aggressive; I can't make it work. I have to have violence come out as an uncontrollable action." His remark made within the context of their group discussion reflects the ethos of the Laboratory Theater, where actors sought to establish an absolute unity between the psychical and the physical. Brook explains that the role requires self-exposure from the actor, for the "secret of the role demands his opening himself up, disclosing his own secrets" (59). In this passage, the actress whose body replaced the mannequin reflects on her effort to break through the psychophysical barriers, which could preclude her from showing the double-sided nature of Prometheus as man and god:

The important thing is to always keep calm, always breath to your own beat, from the abdomen. I was breathing out lightly, when I was breathing; I was sure that I was myself. I didn't find it at all horrible. For all those loud sounds, those noises I was hearing, I tried to take myself out of my body, I mean I had the impression that my body didn't belong to me anymore, that I was above my body, and I had the impression that I was watching you moving around my body, but really, you were the ones who were making fools of yourselves. [ . . . ] I had gotten used to the idea that my body was like dust, that's all. So about Prometheus, it seems to me he was present in every part of his body, that he truly inhabited every part of his body. He must have been on hair-trigger alert, everything must have been very painful to him, and everything must have afflicted him horribly. He had to be, first and foremost, human rather than a god.

Here, the theater serves the actress as a vehicle for what Brook describes as "self-study and self-exploration," to achieve the sacred aim of the Laboratory Theater (59). Rivette adheres to the Grotowskian precepts of acting, which in filmed rehearsals are located in the signs that he claims are "the skeletal forms of human action, a crystallization of a role, an articulation of the particular psycho-physiology of the actor" (34). Through the filmed Grotowskian exercise, Rivette requires the spectator to witness the actor as separate from his role, which is constructed from within a rhythmically articulated system of signs.

## I: Improvisation

The improvisational style of *Out 1* required a definitive departure from *La Religieuse*, where the eighty-five per cent of the dialogue was taken directly from the novel. Rivette wanted to "make a film where the theme isn't fixed in advance, where the filmmaker plays the 16 millimeter card, that of improvisation from within the frame of his canvas" (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 137). In her description of Rivette's style of direction, Hélène Frappat claims that during *Out 1* Rivette relied more on the unforeseen event than on improvisation per se; more on the unexpected occurrence than on the



improvised event (138). Rivette's own remarks lend credence to her conclusion: "There is no improvisation at all, but I really like to see situations unfold as they happen" (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 138). During the filming of *Out 1*, Rivette allowed the young actor Jean-François Stévenin to freely "improvise" the scene in which Stévenin as "Marlon" Brando in *The Wild One* pulls up to Café Nation at la Bastille on his motorcycle in broad daylight. Stévenin later confessed that he was "so green" that he did not know how to drive the bike, so he sat behind his friend who actually drove it (*le Veilleur*). Stévenin still remembers the crucial moment before the scene commenced: "I think: either my life ends here at the door, or it works" (*le Veilleur*).

As the scene opens, we watch from behind the bar as "Marlon," wearing dark glasses, a leather jacket, and cap, enters the bar and approaches Frédérique, who casually remarks, "Hey, Marlon. How's it going? Your bike is really cool. You want to go for a ride?" A cut reframes the two as Marlon replies to her in slurred English, "Listen, baby." Frédérique grabs his cap, and their exchange quickly escalates to the point where he is roughing her up. Another quick cut to a close-up exposes Frédérique's hand just as she filches cash from his pocket. Rivette's camera continues to simply follow the action, as the two of them fall to floor, slapping, kicking, and hitting each other. Marlon leaves Frédérique on the floor, crying, but she is reassured once she checks her pocket to be sure that his cash is still there. Rivette allows this scene, which lasts approximately five minutes, to unfold before the camera, preferring to move the camera to reframe the actions, rather than cut. The quick cut to the close-up of the hand is intentionally jarring when inserted into this scene filmed in long take-long shot style. It forces our attention to the conspiratorial rapport between the director and the actors engaged in



Figure 4.4. Jean-François Stévenin in *Out 1*, playing “Marlon” Brando in *The Wild One*.

“staging” the film performance. Costume, gesture, and intonation force our attention to the persona that the actor Stévenin reinvents, while the abrupt cut calls attention to the presence of the director who, in similar fashion, is manipulating the profilmic materials available to him.

The meta-filmic structuring of this scene works differently from the reflexive structuring of filmed rehearsals. The filmed rehearsals of Aeschylus situate the spectator in the process of watching the actors prepare for an ostensible, finished production of a play that is never seen; at Café Nation, the spectator witnesses the “theatrical” re-staging of a scene from *The Wild One*, a released film that the spectator has ostensibly already seen. In both scenes, the codes specific to film—particular shots, shot constructions—establish complicity with those codes that film shares with theater—costume, gesture,

intonation—to produce a reflexive theatricality, which problematizes conventional definitions used to distinguish theater from cinema.

Stévenin remarks that the complicity that characterized Rivette's relationship with his actors during a shoot was unique to him:

Rivette and Rozier point you in a direction, not like a German *Oberfuhrer*, but giving a direction is another way of directing. Jacques did it to perfection. Actors get frustrated, but that's their problem. If they act shit, they want to do better. With Jacques it was a mystery, they [actors] surfed on this fragile thing the moment of the take, always striving to catch up with Jacques' imagination. (*le Veilleur*)

Frappat compares this peculiarly Rivettian mode of "improvisation" to the *cadenza*, an eighteenth-century term for the improvised moment integrated into the final movement of a concert (or of an opera) (138). She explains that the *cadenza* is the moment preceding the final coda, where free interpretation may occur. Interpretive freedom is, however, delimited both by the frame fixed by the author/composer and by the beginning and the end of the score (Frappat 138). Rivettian improvisation is the freedom given to the actors at "the fragile moment of the take," which, Stévenin insists, is a dangerous freedom. The take is similar to the *cadenza*: both offer the artist an occasion to spontaneously improvise or fold, or in Frappat's terms "to fall," which she translates as *cadere*, the root infinitive of *cadenza* (138). Bulle Ogier testifies to the actor's dilemma and to the inherent dangers of improvisation:

For the actors, it was terrible; when we were acting, everything seemed completely abstract: we didn't know what to do, what to say, or why. Rivette knew, Suzanne [Schiffman] too; we floundered around. It was savage improvisation, inflicted as a command: "Go there!" (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 140)

Certainly, Rivette carried his improvisational style of directing to its furthest extreme in *Out 1*, a film where there were no written dialogues and where the actors all contributed

to the construction of the story as it was in the process of being filmed. Rivette continues to value the improvisational style that he had used in *Out 1*, for he claims it allows him to remain in the present:

I would like to say: the present of the film is the scene that we are filming today, and I only want to know about that. Of course, it is necessary to know what we will be filming tomorrow, it is inevitable to envision it; our friends take care of this during the shoot, like Eduardo de Gregorio on several films. During the shoot [*Pont du Nord*], it was Jérôme Prieur who took care of it, someone who is able to be simultaneously present and absent during filming and who can plan one or two days ahead of the present moment to which I cling obstinately, because I do not want to be elsewhere than in the present of what I am shooting right now. (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 138)

When the director resides in the present tense, the actor becomes a pure presence: His gestures and movements are not learned in order to be repeated on the set to create a predetermined meaning, but as Deschamps observes, are denuded, stolen by the act of filming (8). Rather than the organized spatial composition of the Diderotian tableau, the improvised scene of *Out 1* exceeds the impressionistic sweep of Rivette's camera, leading the spectator towards a deeper truth precisely through the mechanisms of its theatricality.

## I: Ionesco

Rivette rejoins the theater of Eugene Ionesco through the design of characters. Ionesco saw his characters as "empty frames, which the actors can fill with their own faces, their own shapes, souls, flesh and blood" (181-82). Before the filming of *Out 1*, Rivette asked his actors to situate their characters socially. Ogier set her character within the alternative space of a boutique based on those she had seen in New York and San Francisco (Frappat 140). Like Rivette, Ionesco also insisted that his actors be inventive

and create their characters: “Into the disconnected and meaningless words that they utter they can put what they like: comedy, drama, humor, themselves, what they have in them that is more than themselves” (182).<sup>6</sup> Ogier insists: “Rivette’s actors are always active participants but, in *Out 1*, he truly pushed this method to the extreme” (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 140). Both Rivette and Ionesco force their actors to respond on impulse and without preconception to the situation placed before them in terms of their own instincts and emotions. Rivette’s producer Stéphane Tchalgadjeff claims that the degree of latitude Rivette allowed his actors during the filming of *Out 1* created a situation where they “found themselves in a sort of lion’s den, in competition with each other. Certain actors realized this very quickly, others later. It is a possible subtext of the film: There are those actors who seize power with respect to their importance within the story in the manner in which they intervene in it” (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 147). The hollowness of the characters in *Out 1* allowed each actor to exercise—or fail to exercise, as it were—freedom of instinct and imagination. It is through the actor that Rivette’s film rejoins Ionesco’s theater. Rather than a psychologically motivated and convincingly naturalistic character, the actor in Ionesco’s theater, as theater historian James McTeague explains, is presented with “a character that is mere framework, which the actor must fill out” (60). Like Ionesco, Rivette relies on the actor’s sensitive response and inventiveness to suffuse the character and bring it to life.

Rivette allows his actress Juliet Berto total freedom to explore the limits of her character Frédérique. In a brilliant sequence that unfolds in a single take, Berto stages a gunfight with herself on the stairs of her apartment building. Wearing a wide-brimmed red hat resembling a “cowboy hat” and carrying a gigantic pistol, Frédérique runs up and

down the staircase, playing the game of “cowboys and Indians” with herself. At one point, she even sets herself up as a stooge, by placing her hat on the gun barrel and allowing the adversary—herself—to shoot at it. She races to the bottom of the stairs to return fire, while providing sound effects of gunfire. She finally mortally wounds herself and falls to her death, but then rises to play the role of cowboy hero. Working from



Figure 4.5. Juliet Berto as Frédérique playing “cowboys and Indians,” *Out 1*.

within the predetermined framework of a film genre allows Berto the freedom to invent within the limits of its code. This scene relies solely on “virtuoso acting,” a term that William T. Oliver uses to characterize the acting style that Ionesco demanded (qtd. in McTeague 62). Oliver’s term “virtuoso” acquires a specific meaning, as McTeague

explains, when used to describe the performance style of Ionesco's plays, which require "an actor who can 'hold the stage' alone and unattended as well as an actor who responds to the obligation of the ensemble and of the *mise-en-scène*" (63). It is in this sense that the term "virtuoso" can be applicable to Berto's acting style in the cowboy scene.

In another apartment scene, Rivette's camera frames Frédérique, who is turned facing the wall of her *chambre de bonne*. There is an abrupt cut to Lili leaving by the metro following her collective's rehearsal. We suddenly return to Frédérique's room where she begins to count, reciting numbers, which, at first, appear to conform to a pattern, "Fifteen, forty, fourteen, forty, thirteen, forty, twelve, forty [. . .]" but then fall in random order. The décor of her room is sparse: a rag doll, a mattress on the floor, an Indian curtain covering one wall, a lamp, and a few knick-knacks. She circles the room slowly, and the camera circles 180 degrees with her. She seems to be playing hide-and-seek now, but with the camera, the spectator, herself? At the end of her recitation, she pauses, perplexed, as her glance just barely grazes that of the camera. Here, Rivette chooses to film a sparsely furnished *chambre de bonne* where he places the character Frédérique, who stages her performance of a children's game before a camera that circles to follow her movements. The scene resembles Ionesco's Absurdist drama, which he claims is composed "of words [. . .] turned into sounding shells devoid of meaning; characters [. . .] emptied of psychology" (179). As McTeague points out, the characters in Ionesco's plays are trapped in situations, for "his characters *are* puppets, devoid of psychology" (60). However, he adds that this is not true of the actor, for whom the role provides "a pretext" for imaginative invention (65). Both Ionesco and Rivette transform

the actor's role into "a score without psychological consistency or behavioral causality" (McTeague 65).

Rivette adopts Ionesco's intricate tonal language of nonsense in his film where it becomes an integral part of the *mise-en-scène*. For Ionesco, language achieves its goals through the context of the production elements:

I only attempt to create primitive theatre with images, colors, voices, movement and gestures, pieces of wood and painted planks—and words, also (sometimes not enough, sometimes too many) that mean nothing, at least not in a clear way, aside from their integration in scenic development. (qtd. in McTeague 73)

In Ionesco, there are many long soliloquies and duets, which McTeague reminds us, are reminiscent of the theater of French Classicism rather than the theater of realism (71). Following the scene in which Frédérique mimes a gunfight, Rivette stages two short soliloquies. Colin suddenly appears before us, walking down the street with a text by Balzac. He approaches the camera and stops; his glance follows his finger which points first to the right, then to the left and finally, squarely ahead into the eye of the camera. He proceeds to recite a randomly selected passage from the book and then points to the left, commenting, "To the left!" (*A gauche!*). A bit later, he again appears and precisely repeats the entire sequence of actions, with his final directive "To the right!" (*A droit!*), serving as the sole exception. In these soliloquies, Colin seems to be reminding us that in a film—as opposed to in a novel—words mean nothing aside from their integration in scenic development. In his direct address to the audience, Colin uses words to achieve a dislocation of reality—rather than the illusion of reality constructed in the classic readerly novel—that forces the spectator to take a fresh (if metaphorical) look around him. In *Out 1*, the spectator must use the film text as the character Colin uses Balzac—as a pretext for



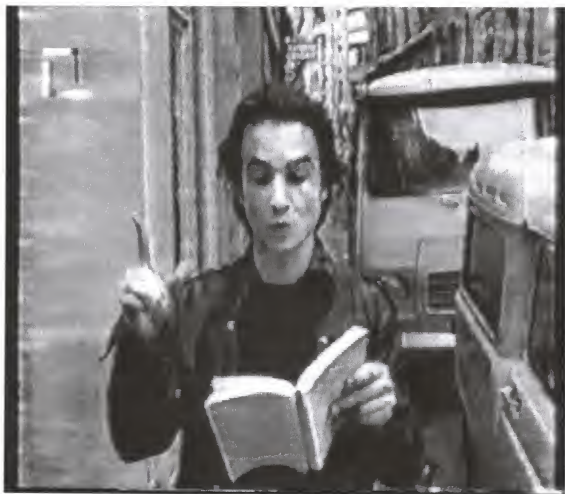


Figure 4.6. Jean-Pierre Léaud as Colin reciting Honoré de Balzac, *Out 1*.

the purposes of discovery.

Characters create chants, incantations, children's songs to protect them from ordinary language, which in the world of Rivette and Ionesco becomes a menacing weapon of the logical, rational world. The aural is balanced with the visual in the scene in which Frédérique sits alone on her mattress in her *chambre de bonne* holding her ragdoll and singing this children's song:

Harlequin has his shop/Arlequin tient sa boutique  
 In the palace markets/Dans les marchés du palais.  
 He teaches politics/Il enseigne la politique  
 To all his little subjects/A tous ses petits sujets.  
 Ah, monsieur Po!

Ah, monsieur Li!  
 Ah, monsieur Chi!  
 Ah, monsieur Nelle!  
 Ah, monsieur Polichinelle!

The Frédérique's song is a modified version of this children's melody:

Harlequin has his shop/Arlequin tient sa boutique  
 On the steps of the palace/Sur les marches du palais.  
 He teaches music/Il enseigne la musique  
 To all his little servants/A tous ses petits valets.

This sung soliloquy implicitly addresses the adequacy of everyday language to convey the ontological loneliness of the character. This Rivettian scene borrows from the Beckettian drama, in which, as Leslie Kane notes, characters perform for themselves as much as for others, "while waiting" (112). Rivette's characters are marked, as are those of Beckett, "by their isolation and estrangement from life and from themselves" (Kane 112). Yet the amendment to the well-known children's ditty can be read as an authorial aside to the audience, which draws an explicit comparison between Harlequin's theatrical chant on the palace steps and his political chant in the palace markets. From this perspective, the song might be read as an Absurdist reflection on Marxist dramaturgy and revolutionaries in general. Although one might argue that the song contributes to the organic absurdity of the film and thus, is not meaningful as a credo, one could also contend that it reflects an Absurdist response to Marxist theater. Ionesco disliked Brecht's theater because he claimed that Berliner Ensemble productions "turned the actor into a simple pawn in the chess game of drama, a lifeless tool, denied passion, participation, or personal invention, this time to the advantage of the production, which now, in its turn, attracted all attention to itself [ . . . ]" (18-19). Rivette would certainly have taken issue with such a Draconian dismissal of Brecht. Yet Rivette did refuse

Brecht's conception of an audience that would participate rationally and analytically in the experience of the film, for, like Ionesco, he sought to immerse them in "images and sounds that disorient reason" (McTeague 69).

The characters in *Out 1* occasionally transform nonsensical combinations of words into an unforeseen chain of narrative events. Colin stands before the blackboard and underscores the words "le snark" (the snark) and "treize" (thirteen) taken from passages of Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* and from Balzac's *L'Histoire des Treize*. The passages are copied from a piece of paper that Colin continues to turn in all possible directions—upside down, right side up, to the left and to the right—in a frustrating attempt to crack the encrypted code. Later, he circles "au port" (to the door), "une main" (a hand) and is able to discern the word "opportune." The cryptic message leads Colin to the corner of Rue les Halles and 2 Place St. Opportune in the 1<sup>er</sup> arrondissement, where he discovers Pauline-Emilie's boutique *L'Angle du Hasard*. He paces up and down in front of the bookstore and finally, walks towards the camera where he pulls out his harmonica and plays a few notes for the audience of spectators. Colin's discovery of Pauline-Emilie's boutique will serve as the departure point for their casual flirtation in scenes that follow. As the events unravel, neither the actor nor the spectator is permitted to retreat from the irrational, but must enter into the film's imaginative universe where human dilemmas can be found hidden within the network of random occurrences.

*Out 1* is so consistently derived from the confrontation with language that it immediately evokes the word play of Ionesco's dramas, where puns, alliteration, repetition, and incongruity express what Allan Lewis terms, "a surrealist logic of fancy"

(34). Rivette's choice of Lewis Carroll, however, also reflects the influence of Artaud, who, as Naomi Greene notes, advocated the use of word sounds, verbal tricks, and games involving the sounds of words, similar to Carroll's use of the word "Jabberwocky" (Greene 198).<sup>7</sup> The fascination with letter permutations and numbers evident in *Out 1* is reminiscent of Cabalistic practice, which also appealed to Artaud, whose interest in the sound and shape of words was a reflection of his studies of the Cabalistic teaching of the *Sepher Ha Zohar*, an eighteenth-century Spanish text. Greene adds that the role that the Cabalists ascribed to letters and numbers led to a complicated letter-magic used to discover hidden meanings (211). Perhaps no other moment in the film can better clarify Rivette's magical use of words and numbers than the incantation of Colin in the Paris streets, where language and movement achieve the absurd delirium that Rivette desired. Claspings his text, Colin walks through the bustling streets reciting snippets of Carroll combined with bits of Balzac, which together form a chant that he repeats to himself, to passersby, to children who eye him curiously, and to the camera which tracks alongside him:

L'autre treize a formé  
 une étrange équipage/The other thirteen formed a bizarre crew  
 équipage, équipage, équipage./crew, crew, crew  
 équipage, équipage, équipage./crew, crew, crew  
 équipage, équipage, équipage. . ./crew, crew, crew  
 le boo chassait le snark/the boo hunted the snark  
 treize pour chasser le snark, / thirteen to hunt the snark  
 il n'aurait recontré le boo. . jum!/which would not have met the  
 boojum!  
 qui les a vus s'évanouir/who saw them disappear  
 passe le temps qui les gomme./while passing the time which erased them.

As Colin walks in circles through the city, his steps correspond perfectly with the circular repetition of the lines of his incantation. The spectator recognizes himself in the absurd

world of the street that is transformed into a stage where Colin chants his soliloquy.

Although Rivette's scene is absurd, it is not alienated from the spectator, who is able to both laugh at, if not identify with, Colin's frustrating attempts to discover a hidden meaning in the signs that surround him.

Rivette uses different kinds of duplications or multiplications within the film. The redundancy of actions, stage movements and figures, as theater historian David Grossvogel notes, was also a distinctive characteristic of Ionesco's drama (70). Colin repeats words that serve as his protective incantation; his repeated actions possess the potential to deteriorate into mere mechanical repetition. Silent interludes in which Colin sits and mechanically stamps cards marked "Message du destin" offer an effective dramatic contrast to the noisy sidewalk cafés where he will distribute them as he solicits contributions from the clientele. At times, Rivette repeats entire scenes or sequences twice or three times. One such sequence occurs when Colin takes leave of Pauline outside of *L'Angle du Hasard*. He grabs her arm and threatens to hold her until she allows him to accompany her. Pauline leaves, however, demanding that he let her go. Colin responds by playing his harmonica while walking out of the frame. Rivette then cuts to Lili's collective, which is gathered in large bare room. A close-up frames a cryptic drawing on the wall that reveals geometric shapes alongside scribbled, unintelligible words. Another cut reveals Colin who is back in his apartment, drawing the sign of infinity on the blackboard above Pauline's name. There is an abrupt cut to black, and a circular return to the beginning of the sequence that shows Colin once again trying to detain Pauline. The scene plays out exactly as before, with the significant difference that it closes with an image of Colin going to sleep on his cot. Rivette

duplicates an entire sequence and dislocates the logical sequence of events in which the Hollywood code of a superimposition, a dissolve, or a fade precedes and facilitates the spectator's smooth transition into the space of the character's dream. Rivette inverts the code by showing a nonsensical repetition of events, which precedes rather than follows the image of the sleeping character. The repetition of events can only be ascribed to the space of the character's dream when read retroactively as occurring in *mise-en-abyme* within the space of another dream that is the film itself. Rivette affirms that he wanted, "the film to function like a bad dream, overloaded with coincidences and slips of the tongue, one of those dreams that seems all the more "endless" because you more or less realize that it is a dream from which you are about to wake up, if only to fall back into it again" (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 137).

Like Ionesco, Rivette uses sudden pauses and soliloquies to intensify the surrounding climate of nothingness. The long sweeping pan that frames a solitary silhouette strolling across the deserted beach of Obade, the long take of a deserted Place d'Italie, the tracking shot that follows Frédérique walking aimlessly through anonymous city streets, the long take that allows Colin to play his harmonica as a rote response to every conceivable situation are repeated multiples times. Rather than seeking to instate random moments of absurd perception, Rivette is contriving a film of profound anxiety through his use of repetition and multiplication. Through the use of mirrors, Rivette creates a replication of characters in the film. Mirrors line the walls of the cafés and the rehearsal halls where the theater collectives perform, making it difficult to discern reality from reflection. Characters split through multiple names: Bulle Ogier's character is doubled as Pauline-Emilie, Marcel Bozonnet's character whose face is transformed into

multiple masks has the multiple names of Nicolas-Arsenal-Papa-Théo. As Grossvogel points out, the proliferation of characters complemented by the proliferation of objects was also a favorite trick of Ionesco (69).

Perhaps the most disquieting moment in *Out 1* occurs at Obade where Pauline-Emilie is shown as a mirror reflection seated on the bed with the writer Sarah. The camera moves from the mirror to frame just the face of Pauline-Emilie, while Rivette's extremely long take records her persistent sidelong glances at the absent Sarah. Haunted by the absent presence of Sarah and her relentless glance, she repeatedly demands, "Arrête de me regarder comme ça!" ("Stop looking at me like that!"). She later gazes into a large oval mirror in the downstairs dining room that reproduces multiple reflections of her image. She quickly turns around to glance behind her, but apparently sees nothing. The absent presence of the spectator in the scene rimes with that of Sarah in the previous scene, whose imagined position behind her is at once exposed and denied by her anxious glance. The duplication and multiplications of characters within the film erase psychological differences that exist between them, while uniting them through the cosmic fears and terrors that obsess them all.

*Out 1* engages the audience in a way that transcends identification. Rivette desires to confront the audience and to transport it from its habitual and preconceived notion of a film where characters and events are understandable and action develops causally from those that precede it. Rivette viewed *Out 1* as, "an experience, something that would transform the spectator as he viewed the film, something that he would be subjected to through the film, that he would not be the same after having watched the film" (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 137). Like Rivette, Ionesco was concerned that the

audience participate in the stage production through their total engagement, yet as McTeague notes, the nature of Ionesco's mise-en-scène militates against the possibility of audience identification with the characters (69). Both directors offer oneiric images of humanity's primordial fears, which they hope will disturb the audience's familiar mode of experiencing the world, in a manner similar to the early Surrealists (McTeague 70). Ionesco affirms this ambition:

We need to be virtually bludgeoned into detachment from our daily lives, our habits and mental laziness, which conceal from us the strangeness of the world. Without a fresh virginity of mind, without a new and healthy awareness of existential reality, there can be no theatre and no art either; the real must be in a way dislocated, before it can be reintegrated. (26)

Like Ionesco's stage productions, Rivette's film *Out 1* overwhelms reason and thus, must be absorbed as pure sense experience, breaking the barriers of the audience's consciousness.

## S: Serial

Rivette initially conceived of his film as an eight-part television serial, but French national television l'ORTF refused to purchase the thirteen-hour version. He had already conceptualized a first episode of *Out 2* in which the improbable band led by Marie-France Pisier would have cut through Paris (with Claire Nadeau, Josée Destoop, Lorraine Santi, Alain Cuny, and Sami Frey) (Frappat 137). It is through the serial form that Rivette rejoins the silent film style of Louis Feuillade and his film *Les Vampires* (1915-16), composed of ten episodes. While Feuillade's serial films were extraordinarily popular in their time, as Richard Roud has observed, it was not until the first Cinémathèque revival of *Fantômas* (1913) in 1944 that Feuillade was recognized as an important figure in French cinema (348). If the style and the subject matter of *Fantômas*



and *Les Vampires* provided Rivette with the impetus for his engagement with the serial form in *Out 1*, the total serialization of composer Pierre Boulez provided Rivette with another source of inspiration.

During the period when he served as the editor-in-chief of *Cahiers*, Rivette frequented the concerts of the Domaine musicale founded by Pierre Boulez (Frappat 117). Jean-André Fieschi argues that Rivette draws on the serial method of Boulez, who differentiated his method of “serial thinking” from classical tonal thinking: “Classical tonal thinking is based on a universe defined by gravitation and attraction; serial thinking, on a universe in perpetual expansion” (qtd. in Fieschi 875). “Serial thinking” no doubt appealed to Rivette whose serial film *Out 1* provides an alternative to classical continuity style in much the same manner that Boulez’s complex, serialist compositions represent an alternative to classical tonality. Rivette’s 1962 review of Elia Kazan’s *Splendor in the Grass* echoes the “serial thinking” that characterized Boulez’s compositions:

Here the fragment, ineluctable, is a sign for the whole; the serial cell contains all the potentialities of the work; the chant that resonates from the depths of one’s being can only be born of this debris, or dust. An uneven, broken construction, in which the conflict between traditional dramatic elements and free structures—whose rigour is even more secret, its appearance that of the improvised—is the well-thought-out image of the theme; a construction which *seems* to be the work of time itself, a decisive step towards that fully atonal cinema foreclosed in all the great works of today. (my translation, 36-37)

In *Structures* Book I (1952) Boulez elaborates on the actual 12-tone series in permutations of pitch, duration, and dynamics, remarking that in order to “create effectively one has to consider delirium and, yes, organize it” (“Pierre Boulez” 2). In his *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Boulez introduced elements of aleatory (chance) music, for he felt that “music must be hysteria and collective spells, violently of the present” (“Pierre

Boulez” 2). Rivette acknowledged that avant-garde music provided him with a model for his films, remarking in a 1968 interview with *Cahiers* that “the greatest ambition of film, formally, is to find an equivalent, in the cinema, of the recent experiments of Stockhausen: that mixture of the constructed and the aleatory, and which necessarily implies time, duration” (15).<sup>8</sup> In the *Structures* of Boulez or the apocalyptic *Otages* (*Hostages*) of the Holocaust painter Fautrier, Rivette discerns an ethic of respect (*recul*) that each artist adopts before the work of art. Rivette refuses to assume control over the direction of *Out 1* and instead, in the manner of Boulez, “retreats” before the work, which he allows to unfold before him.

The relinquishment of control that Boulez practiced and that Rivette aspired to in *Out 1* recalls the precepts of Bazinian realism, which demanded the effacement of the director’s controlling presence before the world of natural phenomena. As Roud notes, it is no mere coincidence that the revival of Feuillade coincided with the rediscovery of location shooting in the Italian neorealist cinema during the 1940s and also with the new interest in composition in depth, inspired by the films of Orson Welles (348). Feuillade’s compositions, like those of Rivette in *Out 1*, were and remained almost exclusively in depth. Roud observes: “One could call it a theatrical point of view, if it were not for the fact that there has seldom been a director who could so escape theatrical perspective through the use of light and movements of his characters” (350). The in-depth compositions of *Out 1* rely more on the tradition of realism represented in the work of documentary filmmaker Jean Rouch: “*Out* is the only film where I truly attempted to adapt the methods of Rouch” while adding that “Rouch is contained in Renoir” (“temps débordé” 10). In *Out 1*, Rivette explores the combination of realistic treatment and

melodramatic subject that was, in Roud's opinion, the hallmark of Feuillade's oeuvre (350).

Rivette fashioned the serial format of *Out 1* much in the same manner that Feuillade had composed *Les Vampires*, which was written as he went along (Roud 10). The subject of Feuillade's film is a gang of jewel thieves, called the Vampires. The nominal hero Philippe Guérande is a journalist who, along with his trusted cohort Mazamette, is determined to capture this criminal gang. Preying only on the rich, the Vampires have formed a conspiratorial plot against established society and thus, act as a potentially revolutionary force that is rising up to take over the world.<sup>9</sup> The roots of Feuillade's serial are in part literary, and as Roud points out, can be traced to Eugene Sue's three-volume *Les Mystères de Paris*, one of the world's first great bestsellers. Its melodramatic rendering of a subterranean "classes dangereuses" amplified the obsession criminal conspiracies that had begun in the early 1840s when a collective paranoia preoccupied Parisians (Burton 51). While both serial films *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* are rooted in this literary tradition of nineteenth-century melodrama, they were different in content. In Sue's novel, the wicked were punished, and the good triumphed. Both *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* are glorifications of evil. The popularity of both serial films, in Roud's opinion, can be attributed to the exploits of the various anarchist gangs that were terrorizing and fascinating France at that time (351).

*Les Vampires* glamorizes an evil underclass of conspirators that, according to Roud, could be associated with the Bande à Bonnot and other anarchist gangs, which were terrorizing and fascinating France (9). In *Terreur Noire*, André Salmon describes the French reaction to the Bonnot gang:

Newspaper readers were thrilled. Certainly, they trembled a little; the more sensitive were horror-struck. But a great many people nevertheless found themselves won over by a kind of admiration. The cinema was not yet fully developed; the *Série Noire* was still to be invented. But they already had a real-life cinema. Were these men scourges of God, tragic bandits? Something like that [. . .]. (qtd. in Roud 351)

While the petite bourgeoisie was horrified by the disruptive potential of these gangs and the threat they posed to private property, the working-class undoubtedly relished the notion of the rich being terrorized. The Band à Bonnot was the most famous, but there were others. Roud observes that the eruption of these gangs into the bourgeois life of its victims and their assault on its conservative values remain connected to the popularity of *Les Vampires* and *Fantômas* (351). As Annette Michelson aptly remarks, *Les Vampires* portrays the Paris cityscape as the site of an apocalyptic dislocation:

Haussmann's pre-1914 Paris, the city of massive stone structures, of quiet avenues and squares, is suddenly revealed as everywhere dangerous, the scene and subject of secret designs. The trap door, secret compartment, false tunnel, false bottom, false ceiling, form an architectural complex with the architectural structure of a middle-class culture. The perpetually recurring ritual of identification and self-justification is the presentation of the visiting card; it is, as well, the signal, the formal prelude to the fateful encounter, the swindle, hold-up, abduction or murder. (qtd in Roud 10)

In *Out 1*, Rivette transposes the labyrinthine landscape of *Les Vampires* into the architecture of contemporary Paris, transforming the ambiguous representative of law and order Guérande into the character of Colin. Like Guérande, Colin is double-sided: He is a swindler (a fake deaf-mute who strolls through cafés, selling his visiting cards marked "Message du destin" to those who can be duped) and an investigator (a researcher who attempts to crack the code of the mysteries, which refer both to Balzac's *L'Histoire des Treize* and Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*). Through his tenacious efforts, Colin discovers the existence of a conspiratorial band called the *Treize*, which bears

resemblance to the insidious underclass of *Les Vampires*. This myth of the criminal conspiracy that infiltrated the textual system of *Paris nous appartient* reemerges within *Out 1*, where the underworld of “classes dangereuses” resurfaces as the *Treize*, a secret organization that coexists beneath the Panoptic structure of the city.

Within the fossilized structure of bourgeois society depicted in the film, Feuillade's female character Irma Vep (the anagram of Vampire) is the revolutionary persona who wields a transgressive erotic power. During the day, Irma works in menial positions as a bank clerk, a maid, or a switchboard operator; however, at night, she assumes the powerful role of co-conspirator and seductress who collaborates with and controls such evil criminals as the Grand Vampire, Moreno, Satanas, and Venemous. Rivette cites the figure of Irma Vep (Musidora) in the character of Frédérique, who is also a criminal, seen hustling in cafés, cocking her loaded gun, and assuming various disguises. The final episode of *Out 1* in which Frédérique is shot and killed mirrors the opening episode of *Les Vampires* in which we are introduced to Irma Vep. Irma first appears before us as a hooded figure all in black creeping through an open window to steal jewels. We later see her dark silhouette skulking across Paris rooftops, stepping across the rungs of a fire escape ladder like a tightrope walker, and finally escaping down a drainpipe. Frédérique's final appearance in Rivette's film reproduces this episode as well as the final episode of *Les Vampires* in which Irma is shot and killed. Frédérique appears before us disguised in a black mask, stealing across a rooftop and then sneaking up a side stairway, where she cautiously waits to make her move. She attempts to take aim with her enormous pistol but is spotted first and killed in “cold blood,” shown by a high angle shot that lingers on her blood-spotted shirt. The scene's status as a moment of

pastiche is apparent, but in Rivettian fashion, the entire scene is replayed from start to finish once again, as if to underscore its function as gratuitous spectacle, rather than simply as narrative intrigue.

Rivette's method allowed him to discover magical complicity within the everyday exchange, placing him within an alternative tradition of filmmaking that Alain Resnais defines as follows:

People say there is a Méliès tradition in the cinema, and a Lumière tradition. I believe there is also a Feuillade current, one which marvelously links the fantastic side of Méliès with the realism of Lumière, a current which creates mystery and evokes dreams by the use of the most banal elements of daily life. (qtd. in Roud 11)

Roud locates the fantastic side of Feuillade in the surrealism of Louis Aragon and André Breton, who had been among those who defended the director during the 1920s. In their play *The Treasures of the Jesuits*, the following lines appear: "Soon it will be generally understood that there is nothing more realistic and at the same time more poetic than those serials which the intellectuals used to make fun of. It is in *The Perils of Pauline*, it is in *Les Vampires* that one must look for the great reality of this century—beyond fashion, beyond taste" (qtd. in Roud 349). The exploration of the fantastic, the mutation of a dreamlike world with the everyday event, which are techniques of surrealism, are found both in the films of Feuillade and those of Rivette. The incitement contained in his film's title "Out" as well as the transparent homage to Breton in the title "Amour fou" suggest that Rivette had absorbed the lessons of the surrealism found in serial films of Feuillade. Through surrealist techniques, Rivette aspired in *Out 1* to achieve a linguistic freedom, a richer and less conscious imagery, and a liberating form. Like the surrealists, Rivette also sought to express the unexpressed and the inexpressible through the

everyday realm, in the objects, the circumstances, and in the familiar patterns that are defamiliarized through film form. Rivette's post-May 1968 Paris, the city of monumental stone sculptures, of empty cafés and squares, of haunted villas, is suddenly revealed as everywhere dangerous, the scene and subject of secret designs. Mirrored walls, secret desk compartments, labyrinthine corridors, vacated apartment buildings, shady cloistered courtyards, metro tunnels, form an architectural complex that subtends the architectural structure of bourgeois culture—providing the last visual trace of the May 1968 moment.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> At the request of Janine Bazin and André S. Labarthe, Rivette in 1966 filmed *Jean Renoir, le Patron* in association with *la série Cinéastes de notre temps*, which was a retrospective on the director made for French television. Rivette states that the two weeks that he spent with Renoir, listening to him talk about the cinema and about his relationship with his actors, renewed his desire to pursue completely different avenues in his own work (qtd. in Frappat 133).

<sup>2</sup> In "Renoir le Patron, Rivette le Passeur" *Conférences du Collège d'Histoire de l'Art Cinématographique* (Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1992-93), Jacques Aumont defines the word "patron" within the context of the film title. According to Aumont, Renoir, as "the patron," is not the equivalent of the "master," who is associated with professionalism, mastery, and certitude. A master will have disciples; the patron will not, although he may ultimately have apprentices. Generally, the term "patron" refers to non-intellectual trades, to artisan and manual trades. The patron—who can, however, be a successful professional—has a more practical, more affective, relationship with what he is doing (217).

<sup>3</sup> In *Prometheus Bound* Aeschylus explores the myth of Prometheus. Prometheus, in defiance of Zeus, has saved mankind and given them fire, and thus, he is chained to a remote crag as a punishment ordered by the king of the gods. Despite his isolation, Prometheus is visited by the ancient god Oceanus, by a chorus of Oceanus' daughters, by the "cow-headed" Io (another victim of Zeus) and by the god Hermes who demands from Prometheus his knowledge of a secret that could threaten Zeus's power. After refusing to reveal his secret, Prometheus is cast into the underworld for further torture. The drama of the tale lies in the clash between the irresistible power of Zeus and the immovable will of Prometheus, who has been rendered still more stubborn by Io's misfortunes at the hands of Zeus. The most striking and controversial aspect of the play is its depiction of Zeus as a tyrant. Prometheus himself has proved to be for later ages an archetypal figure of defiance against tyrannical power, a role exemplified in Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem *Prometheus Unbound* (1820).

The third and only surviving play of a connected trilogy, *Seven Against Thebes*, presented in 467 B.C., deals with the impious transgressions of Laius and the doom subsequently inflicted upon his descendants. The first play seems to have shown how Laius, King of Thebes, had a son despite the prohibition of the oracle of the god Apollo. In the second play it appears that that son Oedipus, killed his father and laid a curse on his own two sons, Eteocles and Polyneices. In *Seven Against Thebes*, Eteocles is shown leading the defense of the city of Thebes against an invading army led by his brother Polyneices and six chieftans from the south of Greece who are bent on placing Polyneices on the Theban throne. Eteocles sends defenders to each of the seven gates of Thebes, but he insists on fighting at the seventh gate, where his opponent will be Polyneices. There the brothers kill each other, and the Theban family is thus exterminated, bringing to an end the horrors set in motion by Laius' defiance of the gods.

<sup>4</sup> Bettina Knapp in *French Theater Since 1968* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995) notes that Ariane Mnouchkine's direction and translation of *Les Atrides—Iphigénie à Aulide* (Euripides), *Agamemnon* (Aeschylus), *Les Choéphores* (Aeschylus), and *Les Euménides* (Aeschylus)—in 1990 remains a high point in her career at the Théâtre de Soleil. In these four epic pieces, Mnouchkine probes, "the fundaments of myth, magic, and the magnificence of theater" (Knapp 87). Knapp notes that Mnouchkine's production evokes Nietzsche's "strange and barbaric" approach to theater, the ritualistic quality of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, and the performance style of both Nô and Kabuki theaters (87). Certainly, her distinctive combination of theater styles echoes Rivette's eclecticism.

<sup>5</sup> While at *l'Atelier*, Artaud first met and befriended the young actor Jean-Louis Barrault, who became familiar with Artaud's notion of "total theater." Artaud would later praise Barrault's experimental productions for their attempt to use the actor's body, voice, and movement (Bradby 166). Artaud's influence was evident in Barrault's celebrated production of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* at the Marigny theater in 1955.

<sup>6</sup> James McTeague in *Playwrights and Acting: Acting Methodologies for Brecht, Ionesco, Pinter, and Shepard* (London: Greenwood Press, 1994) counterposes the acting method of Ionesco to that of Stanislavski, noting that in the Ionesco method, "The actor must ask: 'How would I feel and behave if I were in this predicament?' Not the Stanislavskian 'If I were the character in these circumstances, what would I feel and do?'" Because the character serves as a framework for the actor's free invention in both the films of Rivette and the plays of Ionesco, Rivette must rely on his actors to invent their characters in a manner that more closely resembles the acting method used by Ionesco.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1876) is the tale of a ship and its crew, which includes a Bellman, a Boots, a Barrister, a Broker, a Billiard-marker, a Banker, a Baker, a Butcher, and a Beaver. The unlikely crew is searching for a Snark, identified by five unmistakable marks: 1) "the taste which is meagre and hollow, but crisp" 2) "its habit of getting up late you'll agree that it carries



too far” 3) “its slowness in taking a jest” 4) “its fondness for bathing-machines” 5) “ambition.” The Bellman adds that, “although common Snarks do no manner of harm, . . . some are Boojums—” (22-24). Carroll’s tale provides Rivette with a thinly veiled allegory that provides the spectator with a story *in* the film and *of* the film. The ship’s Captain, whose task is to guide the ship in a certain direction using a map of “conventional signs” appears instead with a map that is “a perfect and absolute blank,” as Rivette appeared before his own crew of actors without a script. The elusive Snark, which is actually a Boojum, vanishes at the very instant they encounter it, similar to the meaning that one seeks to attribute to the sequence of events in *Out 1*, which vanishes the very instant one tries to pin it down. Carroll’s story ends as follows:

Erect and sublime, for one moment of time.  
In the next, that wild figure they saw  
(As if stung by a spasm) plunge into a chasm,  
While they waited and listened in awe.

“It’s a Snark!” was the sound that first came to their ears,  
And seemed almost too good to be true.  
Then followed a torrent of laughter and cheers:  
Then the ominous words “It’s a Boo—”

Then, silence. Some fancied they heard in the air  
A weary and wandering sigh  
That sounded like “jum—!” but the others declare  
It was only a breeze that went by.

They hunted till darkness came on, but found  
Not a button, or feather, or mark,  
By which they could tell that they stood on the ground  
Where the Baker had met with the Snark.

In the midst of the word he was trying to say,  
In the midst of his laughter and glee,  
He had softly and suddenly vanished away—  
For the Snark was a Boojum, you see.

<sup>8</sup> David Schiff in “Unreconstructed Modernist” (*The Atlantic Monthly: Digital Edition*, Music—September 1995) claims that whereas Boulez had seen the future of music as emerging from a synthesis of elements from the past, Karlheinz Stockhausen called for total break from all past musical forms. Schiff affirms that while Stockhausen reduced music to “information,” his contemporary John Cage refused to differentiate music from noise or silence. Stockhausen composed a piano piece whose nineteen episodes could be played in whatever order the performer chose, so that no two performances would be the same.

<sup>9</sup> In "*Les Vampires* de Louis Feuillade, une stratégie de coopération spectatorielle" *Iris* 17 (Automne 1994), Natalie Leplongeon notes that the narrative complexity of *Les Vampires* leads to the elaboration of a cognitive strategy that makes the spectator a complicitous ally in the (re) construction of meaning: "On pourrait dire que ce film ne joue pas tant "sur" son spectateur qu'"avec" lui" (One could say that the film does not so much play "on" the spectator as "with" him" (178). The circulation of knowledge in the film relies partially on repetition; Feuillade uses repetition in an unconventional manner to provide the spectator with multiple options, thereby allowing the spectator the latitude to construct his/her own hypothesis as to the outcome of an intrigue.

CHAPTER 5  
FROM TOURNEUR TO MAETERLINK AND DEBUSSY:  
SOUNDING OUT THE OPERATIC IN *NOROIT*

It will be he who, by only half saying things,  
will enable me to graft my dream on to his;  
he who will conceive characters whose story and home  
will not belong to any specific time or place;  
he who will not tyrannically force upon me the "compulsory scene"  
and who will let me, here and there, feel free to be more  
of an artist than he and to complete his work.

— Debussy 1889; description of the ideal poet

Rivette reconceptualized the notion of the film serial in the mid-1970s, when he conceived of *Les Filles du feu* (*Girls of Fire*), a cycle of four films.<sup>1</sup> Although each film was to have represented a different genre—a love story, a film of the fantastic, a western, a musical comedy—Rivette confirms that certain characters were to reappear from film to film in different guises" (*Cahiers* no. 323, 48). Clearly, the cycle represents the culmination of Rivette's dream of a "*cinéma permanent*" (a cinema showing continuous programs), which was initiated in *Out 1*. While in some sense the cycle can be viewed as a supplement to the unfinished serial *Out 1*, the series' official title submitted to CNC, *Scènes de la vie parallèle* (*Scenes from a Parallel Life*), reflects Rivette's intent to look beyond "those things linked, either closely or distantly, to what was going on in France at the time" (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 150). Rivette turns his glance from the conservative backlash of the 1970s, put into place with the election of Giscard d'Estaing, whose politics provided the French populous with a modern and moderate alternative to

Gaullism. Rather than focusing on contemporary history, Rivette constructs a mythological universe in *Les Filles du feu*, a musical landscape inhabited by ghosts and goddesses. In a 1981 interview, Rivette revealed that he conceived of uniting his cycle of films through a "progression of complication linked to the intervention of music on action" (*Cahiers* no. 323, 48). He expresses here his wish to accord a certain import to music in the production of meaning and, in this way, Rivette moves his art into the realm of operatic dramaturgy, where, as Joseph Kerman reminds us, the relationship or interplay between action and music is the perennial central concern (58). Of the films that comprise the cycle, however, *Noroît* is perhaps the most straightforwardly operatic, the most indebted to opera in its conception.

*Noroît* represents Rivette's first attempt to bring together the three arts, music, dance, and poetry, and in this respect, the film bears resemblance to the composite work of art, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, theorized by Richard Wagner. During the mid-nineteenth century, Wagner turned his back on historical drama and turned toward what George Kernodle describes as the "deeper, more psychological, more abstract" dimensions of myth and legend, which he terms the "new Romanticism" (9). Wagner aspired to create a new synthesis in which the arts relinquished their autonomous identities and found a "glorious salvation in the new society" that the composite work of art represented (Kernodle 9). In Wagner's terms, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* becomes "the mutual compact of the egoism of the three related arts" (5). Rivette achieves an effective interplay between the three arts in his film; yet music does not underscore the words in the manner of Wagnerian opera but follows a parallel path, creating an independent adjacent atmosphere that makes its own comment on the actions. Film music has more often

followed the Wagnerian concept, underscoring the script to create atmosphere and build emotional climaxes (Kernodle 17). Rather than using music to establish a linear, oriented dramatic time, Rivette uses music in *Norôit* to instate the predominance of lyrical time—that of an Impressionist opera, where time, as Gérard Loubinoux observes, “instead of unraveling tends to wind up, distend, and repeat, creating a subjective time of lyrical effusion” (my translation 79). Rivette uses music to frustrate meaning, creating a film that slips from the reality principle associated with the temporal progression of narrative events into the pleasure principle elicited through music.

Opera displaces historical concerns to temporal ones. It has, as Isabelle Moindrot reminds us, been oriented towards the past:

At the dawn of time, Memory—Mnémosyne, the Titanide—united with Zeus for nine nights. In this manner, she gave birth to the Muses. The most eminent among them, Calliops—Kalliopê, “The Woman with a Beautiful Voice”—became afterwards, according to the legend, the mother of Orpheus. (my translation, 17)

This mythic lineage articulated by Moindrot that affirms the inextricable link between memory and music reminds us of their complicitous potential in Rivette’s film.

Complementing Moindrot’s allusion to myth, Pierre Nora’s affirmation that theater’s contemporary vocation is of the order of memory associates it with that of opera:

Memory, history: far from being synonyms, it seems that everything opposes them. Memory is life, in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of recollection and amnesia, unaware of successive deformations, vulnerable to the various uses and manipulations, susceptible to the long periods of latency and of sudden revitalizations. History is the reconstruction, which is always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is always an actual phenomenon, a lived link to the eternal present; history a representation of the past. Because it is affective and magical, memory only accommodates the details that comfort it; it nourishes itself from blurry, telescopic recollections, global or fleeting. . . . History because it is an intellectual operation calls upon analytic and critical discourse. Memory installs remembrance into the sacred; history

flushes it out. . . Memory is rooted in the concrete, in space, gesture, image and object. History only attaches itself to temporal continuities, to evolutions, and to the rapport of things. Memory is an absolute; history only knows the relative. (my translation, qtd. in Banu 12)

Opera's potential to invoke an affective and magical order allows Rivette to turn away from contemporary events, away from historical drama, and turn instead towards mythic memory in *Noroît*. It is through opera—specifically Claude Debussy's Impressionist work *Pelléas et Mélisande*—that Rivette remembers his friend and mentor Jean Cocteau.

In 1962 poet and cinéaste Jean Cocteau designed the décor and costumes for the Marseille production of *Pelléas*, which went on to Metz and Strasbourg, and then in 1963 replaced the centenary production at the Opéra-Comique (Nichols 140). Cocteau's designs were modeled on the original Jusseume and Ronsin designs produced for the opera's première performance in 1902 and were, according to Jean Mistler from *La Revue de Paris*, "a very acceptable modernization of the traditional sets" (qtd. in Nichols 163). In an interview with *l'Opéra de Paris*, Cocteau confessed that he had initially refused to do the décors and costumes, in spite of Mme. Maeterlinck's persistent supplications, for he had feared upsetting the delicate balance between dream and pure realism required by the opera (53). After finally consenting to assist with the Opéra-Comique's production commemorating the anniversary of Debussy's birth, Cocteau confided that he was working "quickly and with my eyes almost closed," creating sketches based on early adolescent memories of the première production (*l'Opéra de Paris* 53).<sup>2</sup> Shortly before his death in 1963, Cocteau disclosed plans for a filmed version of Debussy's opera that was, unfortunately, never produced (Touzot 403). During this time, Rivette enjoyed a particularly close, even filial relationship with Cocteau. Indeed, Rivette disclosed in a personal interview that Cocteau was "le coupable" or the guilty one

whose concern and camaraderie brought him to a career in filmmaking. In this context, we may be tempted to characterize Rivette's film as the posthumous completion of Cocteau's final project—the opera-film of *Pelléas et Mélisande*. At the least, *Noroît* discloses the legacy of a theatrical and operatic style passed on to Rivette from Cocteau and, ultimately, from Maeterlinck and Debussy.

### *The Revenger's Tragedy: Theatrical Adaptation*

The story of *Noroît* is not based solely on the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*. It is also adapted from Elizabethan dramatist Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607). Film scholars have noted Rivette's use of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and their exclusive attention to this source attests to the weight of the film's opening titles crediting the play.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Rivette's choice of Tourneur is highly significant, for it is through this revenge tragedy that Rivette pays tribute to Antonin Artaud. *The Revenger's Tragedy* was among the plays Artaud most admired, and he had specifically planned a production of it at Théâtre Alfred Jarry in the 1927-28 season. In the season program written for Théâtre Alfred Jarry's 1928 season, Artaud wrote of the play in relation to Roger Vitrac's *Victor* which was to precede it in the schedule he envisaged:

Second on the list, *The Revenger's Tragedy* by Cyril Tourneur. We are not philosophers or reconstructors. We are men who are striving to vibrate and to cause to vibrate, vibrate in unison. If we no longer believe in a theater of amusement, derivation, filth, fatuousness, we do believe in that sort of exhaustion on an elevated plane upon which the theater guides life as well as thought. We think that after a crucible play like *Victor*, in which an entire period is melted down and remolded, a big, noisy, grandiose, exalting opus like *The Revenger's Tragedy*, which is furthermore a time-tested masterpiece, will correspond to our way of feeling, to our way of thinking. We shall, therefore, put it on. (qtd. in Sellin 38)

Artaud was never to produce *The Revenger's Tragedy*, however. Rivette rejoins Artaud through Tourneur, whose themes of revenge and betrayal are especially well suited to his engagement with conspiracy narrative and with theatrical or filmic fictions as forms of conspiracy. From this perspective, we are invited to read *Noroît* as the realization of both Cocteau and Artaud's unfinished film and theater productions, respectively.

Tourneur's play is set in an unnamed Italianate court ruled by a corrupt Duke and the Duchess and so provides the film with its cast of regal characters as well as its stately décor. Rivette transposes the drama's locale and the gender of its characters, so that the film spectator discovers a vaguely medieval world inhabited by Celtic female deities. The actions of Tourneur's play involve complex schemes of revenge and betrayal enacted by virtually all members of the court, but the play focuses on Vindice the Revenger. The disguised Vindice takes upon himself the implementation of justice, seeking to avenge his dead mistress's murder by poisoning the culprit, the philandering Duke. Yet Vindice has become indistinguishable from those around him in the corrupt court. The play closes with a final murderous duel in which the Revenger is slain along with all those around him, and a new heir ascends the throne. The events in *Noroît* that correspond precisely to those in Tourneur's play focus on Vindice the Revenger, and so the film must be read as an adaptation. Yet the film does not simply adapt the play but stages it as a theatrical performance, thereby compelling the film spectator to view the play simultaneously as an intertextual reference, a filmed play. We will propose that, in this manner, the film's logic validates a double reading, foregrounding its double source in cinematic and theatrical scripting.



The story of *Noroît* is prismatic, as it is informed by the multiple intertextual sources of Tourneur, Maeterlinck, and Debussy. The story does conform, however, to classical Aristotelian form when viewed from a singular perspective of theatrical style. Beyond its contribution of character motivation, décor, and script, *The Revenger's Tragedy* provides *Noroît* with an Aristotelian dramatic form, thus determining a beginning, a climax, and a conclusion (Aristotle 65). Although the film adheres to this tripartite form, it is not driven by the dynamics of Aristotelian dramaturgy found in Tourneur's play, which, as David Roberts points out, elicit our emotion and empathy, our identification and passive uncritical acceptance of the representations of the world (41).<sup>4</sup> Aristotle's dynamics found in Tourneur's tragedy include the trajectory of the tragic hero, the *telos* of the character of the Revenger Vindice that carries him to his fate through and against the resistance of external forces (Roberts 41). Rather than the arrow of teleology of the Aristotelian drama, in *Noroît* we have a field of intertextual forces where the intersection of theater and opera styles disturbs stable signification, leaving moments of incoherence in the construction of meaning. In the synopsis of the film's story that follows, we will show the manner in which the film story adheres to the singular stylistic register of Tourneur's play, focusing on those moments where film and play overlap.

The film begins on a desolate Celtic seacoast on a deserted beach. Like a compass, the film's title *Noroît*, which translates *Northwest Wind*, points to the film's geographical coordinates vis-à-vis the central locale of Paris. Sounds of the ocean surf blend with those of a woman's voice mourning the death of a comrade Shane. In this opening scene, we first meet Morag (Geraldine Chaplin), who is lying prostrate on the beach, bent over Shane's body. She exclaims: "Shane, my brother, I looked for you. I

found you in the ocean on the rocks torn apart, shredded, with my breath, with my hands, I have gathered you again. [ . . . ] I'm the last one, now. Our blood has run dry. It runs to avenge you!" Framed against an unforgiving horizon, a disconsolate Morag declares her desire for revenge and then proceeds to recite a passage from the opening of Tourneur's play that mirrors the revenge theme proclaimed in her opening monologue: "O thou goddess of the palace, mistress of mistresses/to whom the costly-perfum'd people pray [ . . . ]" (I.iii, lines 6-7). As she speaks these lines, she assumes the theatrical role of the Revenger Vindice. At this point in the play, Vindice dons a disguise that will enable him to seek revenge in secret for his mistress's death. Tourneur's play determines our reading of this opening scene. Like Vindice, Morag will engage in complex schemes of revenge to avenge the murder of her lover Shane.

Tourneur's play motivates Morag's movements in *Noroi*. Like Vindice, Morag seeks revenge and so, attempts to infiltrate the court presided over by Giulia (Bernadette Lafont), the female counterpart to Tourneur's philandering Duke. Giulia not only governs the court but the Irish coastline as well. Along with her lieutenant Arno, she leads her band of pirates who carry on occasional looting and raids. Thus, Giulia understands the potential for disloyalty and fears immanent betrayal from her lovers Ludovico and Jacob who are trying to discover where her treasure is hidden. She confesses this fear to her confidante at court Erika (Kika Markham), who later will betray Giulia and serve as Morag's accomplice. Facilitating Morag's efforts to infiltrate the court, Erika encourages Giulia to hire a bodyguard and suggests Morag. Morag and Erika then conspire together, attempting to sabotage a pirate attack led by Giulia, which succeeds in spite of their efforts. Consequently, they seek their own bizarre brand of

revenge, secretly staging rehearsals for a performance of the play *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Morag and Erika's scheming activities culminate in a climactic performance of a scene from Tourneur's play.

*Noroi*'s not only borrows the play's central story of the Revenger Morag but its reliance on subplots of sabotage. For instance, the theatrical conspiracy of Morag and Erika ultimately intersects with Giulia's own jealous plot to murder her sister Régina, who is also Jacob's lover. Held captive in Giulia's court, Régina repeatedly warns her daughter Elisa of Giulia's powers. Elisa is, however, desirous of power. Morag assists Elisa and her young lover Ludovico in their search for Giulia's treasure, which they discover buried beneath rocks at the sea cove, thereby ensuring Elisa's status as successor to Giulia's throne. Having also become the trusted confidante of Giulia, Morag agrees to help her carry out Régina's murder. Morag ensnares Régina, trapping her in a seduction scene with her sleeping lover Jacob. Régina kisses his lips that Morag has laced with poison, and then she dies. While this scene provides the logical completion of the plot that Giulia had previously disclosed to Morag, it is, in fact, a transposition of a scene from Tourneur's play. In the play, the Revenger Vindice disguises his dead mistress's skull as a tempting seductress and tricks the philandering Duke into kissing its poisoned lips. In *Noroi*, the scene of Régina's murder thus sustains a double source of motivation. It is simultaneously generated by Giulia who had concocted the scheme and by the revenge story of Tourneur's theatrical script.

The murder scene derives from dual reference points and then is replayed in the following scene, in which Morag and Erika perform it before an audience composed of Giulia and her court. This sole on-stage performance of Tourneur's play, using both

theater costumes and props, represents the culmination of Morag and Erika's collaborative, clandestine rehearsals. As the theater performance begins, the actress Morag enters wearing a blond wig that disguises her as Régina; we can surmise that here Morag is playing both roles of Régina and the duped Duke. The spectator may then read the performance as either the theatrical restaging of Régina's murder that Giulia had previously ordered, or the spectator may read Régina's murder in the previous scene as a mere theatrical rehearsal for the play's performance. The duplication of scenes does not permit the film spectator to view the Tourneur drama as simply an event occurring within a profilmic fictional world. The staged performance of Tourneur compels the film spectator to view the play simultaneously as an intertextual reference, a filmed play that is staged by the film characters who become theatrical players. As if to match this doubling of scenes, music also plays a duplicitous role, as its function shifts from scene to scene: during Régina's murder, the non-diegetic music accompanies and underscores the characters' actions, as in cinematic melodrama. At the opening of the following scene, a lateral pan locates sound to the side; three instrumentalists (flute, bass, and percussion) become visible on the set and produce the accompaniment to the play. Here, Rivette's *mise-en-scène* conforms to Tourneur's stage directions, which call for musicians to "stand to one side" (III.v, line 213). During the performance, the ensemble of instrumentalists conforms to the strictures of theatrical staging.

Viewed momentarily from the unilateral register of theatrical style, this scene from *The Revenger's Tragedy* serves as the climax of both the film and Tourneur's play. Until this point, both Erika and Morag have been rehearsing specific passages from Tourneur. These passages are not ordered as consecutive scenes from *The Revenger's*

*Tragedy*, nor are they necessarily related to events unfolding within the film's diegetic world. Consequently, the spectator is invited to view their recitation as preparation for a staged performance. Following the climactic performance of Tourneur before Giulia's court, Morag and Erika continue to rehearse lines from various scenes, as if in preparation for the final spectacular scene of revenge—the murderous masque on the castle ramparts. The nondiegetic flute and bass music that accompanies these rehearsals—along with the English script—cue the spectator to the beginning and close of a theatrical recitation. In similar fashion, the spectator is invited to view and read the film in its entirety from within the register of theatrical ritual.

The revenge-masque of *Norôit* is an adaptation of the corresponding scene from *The Revenger's Tragedy* in which the disguised Vindice joins the revengers, whose ritualistic dance serves as the prelude to the murder of those gathered at the masque. The final scene in both texts brings closure to the earlier climactic scene of the Duke's murder. In the Tourneur play, the Revenger, having just tricked and murdered the Duke, then plots the murder of the Duke's son Lussurioso, who is heir to the throne. The Revenger's successful scheme precipitates a fight for power among the remaining brothers at the final masque, each mortally wounding the other. Old Antonio, a nobleman, ascends the throne and immediately commands the execution of the Revenger. While Tourneur's revengers wore "masquing suits," in *Norôit* all revengers wear masks, as they dance silently and then scream or laugh while gesticulating wildly. It is the revenge-masque which most reflects Artaud's tastes and his conception of romantic imagery, in which as Peter Brook observes, "there is a certain preference for darkness and mystery, for chanting, for unearthly cries, for single words rather than sentences, for vast

shapes, masks, for kings and emperors and popes, for saints and sinners and flagellants, for black tights and writhing naked skin" (61). While Tourneur's stage directions call for the "sounding of music" to accompany the masquers' entrance, in the film, atonal music forms an asynchronous interrelation with the expressionistic dance of the revengers. For instance, music intervenes in Giulia's staccato monologue on the ramparts, whose incompleteness seems justified by the music's ceremonial nature: "Miracle. . . those scattered constellations, /This obstinate star, wild, unthinkable, inadmissible /Tendernesses between the raven mother and the bastard /Oh, my sons, forgive me. I will be more worthy of myself. /For a mother to set fire to her own daughter!" Giulia's ritualistic chant during the dance of the masquers presages her final apocalyptic duel with the Revenger Morag on the ramparts.

#### From Maeterlinck to Debussy: *Pelléas et Mélisande*

The final duel between Giulia and Morag clearly transposes Tourneur's drama, creating a far more Artaudian scene, yet at the same time, the *mise-en-scène* of the masque draws on Celtic symbolism. Maurice Maeterlinck, author of the play *Pelléas et Mélisande*, had been inspired by Celtic legend.<sup>5</sup> The masque is infused with Celtic imagery and myth, opening with an image of black clouds passing over a full moon, an image that in this scene demarcates the close of the forty day festival period during which goddesses can appear on earth and converse with mortals. The magical temporal zone of the masque is based on the mythic Celtic battle Samhain, which Miranda Green has described as "a liminal, dangerous occasion when time and space are suspended, and the barriers between the supernatural and earthly worlds are temporarily dissolved [. . .]"(44). Thus, the final duel sequence of *Noroît* does not simply demarcate narrative closure

within the register of theatrical style. Within the closing sequence, the rules governing cinematic time and space are suspended, as montage series are periodically replicated and later replayed as red or sepia-tinted duplications. The uncanny, mirroring effect produced by the repetition of images creates the highly fantastic dimension of the masque, which entails the collapse of boundaries between supernatural and earthly worlds. Shifting into their respective roles as Celtic goddesses of sun and moon, Giulia and Morag remain poised throughout the masque between two worlds—that of humans and that of the spirits.<sup>6</sup>

Maeterlinck's fascination with Celtic myth is evident in the composition and appearance of characters in *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Opera historian Richard Langham Smith observes that Celtic imagery had provided the inspiration for Maeterlinck's character Mélisande, adding that even the spelling of the other characters' names Yniold, Arkel, and Golaud added Celtic color (4–15). According to Smith, Maeterlinck had been especially taken by the visual art of second generation Pre-Raphaelites Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898) and Walter Crane (1845–1915) (4). He draws this comparison between Mélisande and the figures of Burne-Jones: "The haunting figures of Burne-Jones's pallid damsels, their dilated eyes on the verge of tears, distilling the world's sorrow, were clearly implicated in the genesis of Mélisande [. . .]" (4). *Noroi*'s characters bear similar trappings of Irish legend. Rivette's representation of Morag draws heavily on Maeterlinck's Pre-Raphaelite figure Mélisande.<sup>7</sup> Both the mise-en-scène of *Noroi*'s opening sequence and composition of the character Morag bear striking similarity to the corresponding scene from *Pelléas et Mélisande*. As the opera opens, we meet Golaud, prince of Allemonde, who has been out hunting and who has lost track of



Figure 5.1. Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, *The Love Song*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Alfred N. Punnett Endowment Fund, 1947.

the boar he has wounded. Golaud hears sobbing and turns to discover the mysterious Mélisande crying by the water's edge and remarks, "I hear crying. Oh! Oh! What is this by the water's edge? A little girl who is crying at the water's edge." (I.i, line 1).

Golaud's glance is similar to the point-of-view of Rivette's camera that at the film's opening sweeps across the horizon to discover Morag in mourning. Mélisande's origins remain unknown both to herself as well as to the spectator, like Morag's inexplicable appearance on the shoreline—both characters are enigmas by design. Mélisande's musical motif is soft, calm, and slightly sad, as is the melancholy flute refrain that defines Morag in this scene.





Figure 5.2. Mary Garden as Mélisande, at Théâtre National de L'Opéra, April 30, 1902. Cliché Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

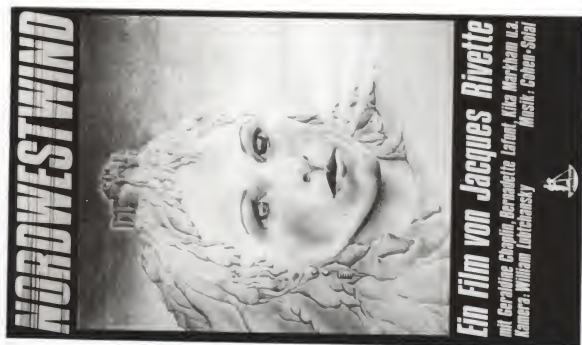


Figure 5.3. Geraldine Chaplin as Morag, poster at the release of *Norôit*.

Like Morag, who incarnates the Celtic notion of sovereignty as moon goddess, Mélisande too is a deity, marked as such by her mysterious gold crown. Following Golaud's initial encounter with Mélisande, he spots her shiny gold crown at the bottom of a well. The crown had been a gift, and although Golaud volunteers to retrieve it for her, she refuses his assistance. The source and signification of the crown remain an enigma, as does the character herself. Indeed, both characters, Morag and Mélisande, project the allegorical presence of the enchantress, which for Jean Starobinski, symbolizes the seduction and mystery of operatic spectacle itself: "The gardens that open to an endless view, the enchanted palaces that take leave of the earth, the caves that offer a secret retreat are the marvels that respond to the call of the enchantress [. . .]" (20-1). Rivette's characters share with those of the opera the capacity to transport us to other worlds—those of enigma and seduction. Rivette was perhaps drawn to Maeterlinck's Symbolist drama *Pelléas* for reasons similar to those expressed by Debussy, who declared after having attended the play's stage première at the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens:

The drama of *Pelléas*—which, despite its atmosphere of dreams, contains much more humanity than so-called real-life documents—seemed to suit my intention admirably. It has an evocative language whose sensitivity could find its extension in music and in orchestral setting. (qtd. in Grayson 32)

On the surface, the capacity of Rivette's characters to seek revenge and to persist in diabolical schemes places them closer to those of Tourneur; however, their underlying power resides in their capacity to convey the atmosphere of dreamlike incertitude that pervades Debussy's opera *Pelléas*.

It seems useful briefly to review the plot of *Pelléas* before we examine the similarities between it and Rivette's film. The opera opens with Golaud's discovery of

Mélisande weeping by the side of a well. He is unable to discover who she is or where she is from. Golaud convinces her to follow him, although he is as lost as she. Golaud marries Mélisande with the consent of both Geneviève, his mother, and the old king of Allemonde Arkel. Some time after her marriage to Golaud, Mélisande seeks relief from the gloomy, dark environs of the castle and joins Geneviève on its seaward side in search of light. The two women are joined there by Pelléas, Golaud's younger half-brother. They spot a ship sailing out of the hazy port, which Mélisande recognizes as the ship that brought her to Allemonde. Following this initial meeting, Pelléas brings Mélisande to the well where he comes to escape the midday heat. Mélisande begins to play with Golaud's wedding ring, throwing it into the air, but suddenly, the ring falls into the well and is lost. They return to the castle, where they find Golaud in bed; a fall from his horse injured him at the same moment that Mélisande lost his ring. Upon seeing Golaud, Mélisande inexplicably begins to cry, and as he attempts to soothe her, he caresses her hand and discovers that her ring is gone. Terrified of his wrath, she lies to him, telling him that it fell off in a grotto by the sea and that the tide came in before she could find it. He demands that she go and find the ring immediately, with Pelléas if necessary. Pelléas accompanies her to the sea cove where they pretend to search for the ring, which, of course, is lost forever.

We later find Mélisande seated at the tower window of the castle, combing her hair and singing a simple lament. Pelléas passes beneath her window and pleads with her to lean further out of the window. Suddenly, Pelléas becomes enmeshed in her hair as it cascades across his face and hands. He fastens it to a blossoming rose. Golaud sees them flirting and becomes jealous. He wanders through the castle's cavernous vaults,

encouraging Pelléas to smell the stench of death from the underground lake. Anguished, Pelléas leaves the château quickly. Once outside, Pelléas again finds fresh air and seems to rediscover the sea as well as the flowers at the edge of the terrace. Golaud no longer trusts his brother or his wife, however, and uses his son Yniold to spy on them. The boy peers through a castle window but sees nothing, for it seems that the horrors are in Golaud's mind. With his future uncertain, Pelléas makes plans to leave the castle forever, yet before his departure, he decides to meet Mélisande for a final rendezvous at the well. Pelléas and Mélisande meet, embrace, and declare their love for each other. Hidden at the edge of the woods, Golaud is watching them in secret. He unsheathes his



Figure 5.4. Jean Cocteau's décor for *Pelléas et Mélisande*, castle interior.  
Photograph Lipnitski.

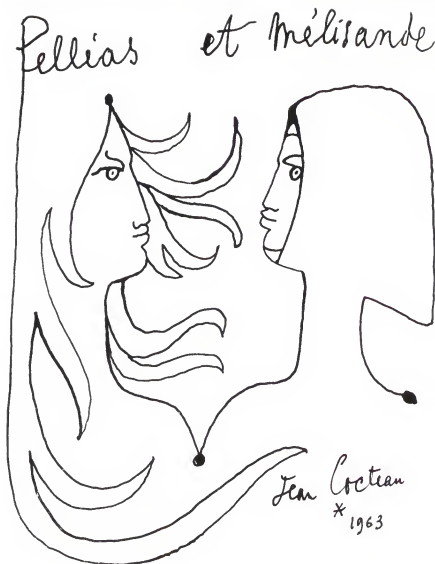


Figure 5.5. Jean Cocteau's design for *Pelléas et Mélisande*. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

sword, strikes Pelléas down by the edge of the well, and then silently pursues Mélisande into the forest. Later, we find Mélisande who lies dying. At her bedside, Golaud attempts to question her about her relation to Pélleas, but to no avail. She dies quietly, without saying anything, a tranquil, mysterious creature. Arkel holds up her newborn

daughter who must be removed from the death-chamber so that she can take her mother's place and ascend the throne.

The décor of *Noroît* is unmistakably indebted to Cocteau's décor from the centenary production of *Pelléas et Mélisande* that gives expression to the poet's earnest wish to recreate the original Jusseume/Ronsin designs. Indeed, *Noroît* represents the culmination of a chain of homage, for it is with this film that Rivette pays homage to Cocteau's *Pelléas*, who, in turn, pays tribute to Debussy's production. From the film's scenes of dark forest, grotto, garden, and coast to the interiors of the castle, resemblances to those of Debussy's opera are striking.

Debussy's dark outdoor environments that include forest and grotto scenes closely resemble those of Rivette's film. In the opera, the forest remains a dark mythic place of secrecy that presents the possibility of danger and sabotage; in the film, the significance of the forest seems split between its symbolic resonance and its potential as spectacle. The opera opens with the horseman Golaud emerging from a dark forest after an aborted hunting excursion; he then hears sobbing and spots Mélisande. At the opening of *Noroît*, the sequence of events is inverted. After our introduction to the tearful Morag, we are privy to the second scene of the film in which mounted horsemen emerge from the dark forest and ride past. This unexpected moment that follows *Noroît*'s opening scene is completely unmotivated with respect to the film's story. It stands adjacent to the plot—a gratuitous spectacle and an oblique reference to Debussy's opening scene. In this scene and in others from the film and the opera, the forest remains a symbolic place of secrecy and sport, implying a vaguely medieval world. Its darker potential is evident in *Pelléas* during the scene of the lovers' final rendezvous, in which Golaud hides by the forest's

edge, waiting for his moment of murderous revenge. In *Noroît*, we again witness the forest's potential to symbolize darker forces. As the scene of pirate sabotage begins, we find ourselves peering out from the forest over the bay as a pirate vessel approaches. This opening panoramic shot becomes retroactively identified with Erika's clandestine point-of-view from the woods, which a reverse shot later confirms. No establishing shot, however, structures spatial relations between the objects, figures, and setting in the scene. The lack of spatial orientation forces us to become aware of our position vis-à-vis Erika's point-of-view and therefore, to reflect on our own role in the network of sabotage and secrecy that the scene constructs. We are distanced from the saboteur's point-of-view and thus, are forced to contemplate the symbolic resonance of the forest and the medieval world it represents (a temporal frame that is contradicted in *Noroît*, however, by the outboard motors that drive the pirate ships!).

While the dreamlike atmosphere of Debussy's opera was captured by the dark and light elements of its mise-en-scène, shadow and light define two poles of dramatic action in *Noroît* as well. In both film and opera, landscape elements such as the sun and the moon presage the forces of destiny. The moonlit grotto is a magic landscape in both film and opera, which determines the fate of the characters. Like Pelléas and Mélisande in search of Golaud's lost ring, Elisa and Ludovico approach the sea cave in search of Giulia's lost treasure. A long low angle shot captures Elisa cautiously crossing a frighteningly narrow precipice, framed within a shaft of moonlight. Here, Elisa's approach to the grotto seems to draw on Pelléas's description of the cave's entrance: "Let's wait for the moonlight to break through that big cloud; it will illuminate the entire grotto and then, we can enter without danger. There are treacherous spots, and the path is

very narrow, between two deep lakes" (II.iii, line 179). The film's mise-en-scène resembles the opera's décor in which the grotto is draped in blue shadows from moonbeams. The dark and light symbolism that is so striking in the film is very significant for Maeterlinck. In his essay on "Mystic Morality" from *Le Trésor des Humbles*, a passage dealing with Man's unsuccessful attempt to voyage into his own soul uses imagery strikingly reminiscent of that of *Pelléas* and of *Noroît*:

We believe we have dived down to the most unfathomable depths, and when we reappear on the surface, the drop of water that glistens on our trembling finger-tips no longer resembles the sea from which it came. We believe we have discovered a grotto that is stored with bewildering treasure; we come back to the light of day, and the gems we have brought are false—mere pieces of glass—and yet does the treasure shine on, unceasingly in the darkness. (qtd. in Smith 110)

Indeed, in *Noroît* the treasure discovered by Ludovico and Elisa literally glows, illuminating the dark grotto with its red radiant light. The sea cave scenes from both *Noroît* and *Pelléas* profit from a dreamlike atmosphere in which a poetic moment is grafted onto the dramatic, producing in both an instantaneous translucence.

The characters of both *Pelléas* and *Noroît* inhabit an old castle that is surrounded by gardens and forest, bordered by the sea on one side. Clearly, Rivette borrows his mise-en-scène from Maeterlinck for whom the sea is associated with past and future journeys away from the destiny of Allemonde. In both film and opera, the sea is viewed as a source of mystery, an agent of destiny that brought Mélisande to Allemonde and Morag to the island kingdom. Characters in both texts are attracted to the space and light of the sea on a clear day. Many scenes from *Noroît* are structured around elements of space, light, and sea. Several other scenes from the film also stand out in this regard, but perhaps the most visually stunning is the sword duel scene between Ludovico and Jacob





Figure 5.6. Act II scene I, Mélisande meets Pelléas at the well by the water. Cliché Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.



Figure 5.7. The castle by the water, *Noroît*.



Figure 5.8. The castle ramparts, *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Cliché Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.



Figure 5.9. The duel and Morag's dance on the castle ramparts, *Noroît*.

on the castle ramparts. There, sea, sky, and sun are transformed into a symbolic force field that is brought to life by the instrumental music of the Cohen-Solal brothers (flute, bass, and percussion), who, according to sound engineer Pierre Gamet, improvised the entire scene with utter spontaneity and freedom (71). The composition of the musical group resembles that of the Nô orchestra, where, according to Waley, the flute player sits beside two hand drummers, one of whom plays with a bare hand and the other with a thimble finger. In some plays, there is the big drum placed on the ground and played with a stick (29). Not only the group's composition but also the function that music plays within the scene recalls the Nô performance. Seami describes its effect:

Before the Sarugaku begins the flute should play for a while in order to quiet the audience and put them in the right mood. When the dancing and singing has begun the flute player must listen to the actor's voice, follow its rhythm and, as it were, "shadow" it. (qtd. in Waley 27)

The duel scene in *Noroît* opens with the hypnotic refrain of the flute and is accompanied by the *accelerando* of the drums, creating an unendurable tension. Seami advised his musicians to bridge differences in the actor's performances by dexterous playing: "Their business is to understand the actors' intentions and follow the rhythms of the singing and dancing" (qtd. in Waley 29). Whereas in the Nô play, the musicians' task is to follow the dancing and recitation of the actors; in *Noroît*, Rivette allowed the musicians' improvised performance to provide his actors with inspiration for their stylized movements and gestures. Consequently, Rivette confessed that the best takes for the musicians inevitably became the best takes for the actors (*Cahiers no. 327*, 18).

During this duel scene, the castle ramparts are transformed into a theater proscenium, while the improvised music introduces a momentary pause in the story's development. Meaning is deferred while the spectator is forced to attend to the sensuality

of sounds, movements, and visual symbolism. One focused interval occurs at the moment Rivette zooms in on the sun, a long take that both interrupts the performance and induces a moment of pleasurable dilation, which is distanced from the abrupt, expressionistic movements of dancers and duelists. Rivette's objective here is to translate the opera's atmosphere, permitting the mysterious forces of the sun and the sea to resonate. The air, water, and light from the sea are regenerative forces in the film that contrast with the dark symbolism of the forest, grotto, and castle. In *Norôit*, Rivette not only borrows the playwright's mise-en-scène but also adopts a Maeterlinckian approach to the significance of the mise-en-scène.

Rivette's scene is similar to Debussy's, insofar as both artists compose narratives where a pause or an ellipsis provides a moment for reflection and for prolongation into music. Two insert shots of the sea follow the Cohen-Solal brothers' performance, prolonging and punctuating it. The first, a long shot of the castle surrounded by the sea shown above, is totally silent. The second shot opens on waves breaking and then pans laterally to a panoramic shot of the castle from a much further distance. The silence of the first shot acquires a musical significance; its duration resembles an ellipsis (suspension points) [. . .] sandwiched between the Cohen-Solal brothers' music and the roar of ocean surf, which saturates the sound track in the second shot. Both the silent ocean vista and the sonic persona of waves that had initially served as the backdrop of the instrumentalists' music are foregrounded here; in this manner, the sea itself plays a participatory role in the total musical performance.

While there seems no question that the film's décor and general atmosphere are indebted to that of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Rivette also used specific scenes from the opera.

Rivette transposes the scene in which Mélisande sings a sad lament as she undoes her hair, allowing it to fall from the balcony window onto Pelléas below. Sung without orchestral accompaniment, Mélisande's song "Mes longs cheveux" carries no symbolic resonance, portraying her as an innocent soul beyond ulterior motives (III.i, line 192). Erika, who like Mélisande, is found seated alone in the tower singing a melancholy ballad, sings the only substantial solo in *Noroît*. At the close of the song, Erika's glance scans the ocean horizon, indicated by a whip pan from the tower window. This brief shot from the tower window is followed by a slow lateral tracking shot across the castle chamber that finds and frames the Cohen-Solal brothers, who take up her sad refrain on flute. Both the ballad-like quality of the song's lyrics and its invocation of Celtic lore are reminiscent of Maeterlinck. Yet her song also invokes Tourneur, as its lyrics reflect the tone of betrayal that pervades the castle: "Old friends and faith have left me." At the close of the musical interlude, Giulia enters Erika's chamber to conspire with her, asking her to betray Morag by inviting her to the final masque. In both *Noroît* and *Pelléas*, the song from the tower signals a moment of conflict and transition in the singer's life. In *Noroît*, Erika's solo performance signals her movement away from her previous role as Morag's longtime co-conspirator to an ambiguous position between Morag and Giulia. During her opera solo, Mélisande, like Erika, is pulled in opposite directions, insofar as she too is caught between her loyalty to her husband Golaud, who literally calls her away from the tower window, and her love for Pelléas, who will become her amorous confidante. In both opera and film, the solo passages signal significant transitional moments in their respective stories.



Figure 5.10. Jean Cocteau's décor for *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Mélisande's solo from the tower window. Photograph Lipnitzki.

#### **Duplicitous Staging: *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *Pelléas et Mélisande***

Debussy's opera also provides *Noroît* with dramatic definition, a beginning, climax, and closure that parallels that of *The Revenger's Tragedy* previously discussed. The Aristotelian form provided by Tourneur that structures *Noroît* is obvious, while that of Debussy's opera is veiled. Indeed, the film is informed by a double voice that is composed of theatrical and operatic intertexts. While these two voices begin and end in unison, they diverge in between the opening and closing scenes, counterbalancing each other. This duplicity is perhaps most evident in its opening scene. As we have already seen, *Noroît's* opening scene foregrounds Tourneur's story that introduces us to the

Revenger Vindice. The film's citation of Tourneur's script in the opening scene effectively masks its phantom source in the opera's tale of Mélisande. As Morag assumes her "theatrical" persona as Vindice the Revenger, marked by her artificial English monologue, the film is simultaneously assuming the Tourneur script like a theatrical mask that hides its duplicitous identification with theater and opera. The "natural" sounds of the ocean surf accentuate the artificiality of Morag's recitation of Tourneur. Rivette had insisted on direct sound in this scene, overriding the numerous objections of his sound engineer Pierre Gamet who disclosed in an interview that "*Noroît* was, in fact, the craziest film I'd ever worked on. Never had I lived through such an adventure" (73). At Rivette's request, the level of the ocean sound was consequently never adjusted later in a sound mix, as would normally have been the case, and so it remains disproportionately loud with respect to the theatrical monologue. Real sound, as François Thomas points out, paradoxically underscores the unreal in *Noroît* (166). In the opening scene, the ocean waves generate a musical persona of their own, which is perceived as auditory excess grafted onto the drama. In this manner, the unreal dimension of *Pelléas* paradoxically translates into film form as real sound, which moves the spectator away from the stasis of a linguistic signified to integration in the totality of spectacle.

As we have seen, the beginning of *Noroît* incorporates the respective opening scenes from both theater and opera productions. The final masque sequence of *Noroît*, which includes spectacle, instrumental music, and dance, is most obviously an adaptation of the corresponding scene from *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Yet one crucial detail differentiates the final film scene from Tourneur's drama. While the play ends with all

familial heirs to the dukedom dead, the film closes as Elisa ascends the throne as Giulia's successor and heiress. This ceremonial initiation rite, which centers the final masque scene of the film, is inspired, not by Tourneur's drama, but by the opera *Pelléas*. During the opera's final scene, the tragic death of Mélisande makes possible a new regime with the coronation of her daughter, heiress to the throne of Allemonde. Similarly, in *Noroi*'s final scene, the deaths of both maternal goddesses during the duel make possible the coronation of Elisa.

The masque opens with an initiation ritual that takes the form of a moonlit, somnambulistic dance in which Giulia and two masquers chant, while encircling Elisa. The goddess of the sun Giulia and her heiress Elisa dance before a burning fire resembling a funeral pyre and are cyclically reproduced in red-colored images. In contrast, the Revenger—moon goddess Morag—is represented in sepia-colored images against a black sky. Their battle for control over Elisa is articulated across the oscillation of colorized images during the final masque, while Elisa is shuttled back and forth between them. In a singular verbal exchange, Morag encourages Elisa to save herself and run away. Giulia is waiting, however, and catches her in flight. With a blinding flash of light, Giulia bestows upon Elisa a magic amulet, and ceremoniously says, "Now you are the heiress!"

During the final duel, dialogue between Giulia and Morag is reduced to elliptical exclamations. As Giulia slays Morag, she proclaims: "Courage, Morag. Tonight I am doubled." to which Morag responds, "Then I will kill you twice!" As Celtic goddesses, Morag and Giulia are able to shift back and forth between divine and human forms, assuming double personas. Similarly, the dramatic shape of the film shifts between its



adherence to a theatrical script that calls for the Revenger to slay and be slain by the maternal "Goddess of the Palace," on the one hand, and its fidelity to an operatic libretto that calls for Mélisande to become and then to beget the maternal "Goddess of the Palace," on the other hand (I.iii, lines 6-7). *Noroît* is informed by a double voice that is composed of theatrical and operatic intertexts, which begin and end in unison. Similar to the film's duplicitous opening scene, the final scene foregrounds Tourneur's story, disguising its double source in *Pelléas*'s tale of the medieval queen Mélisande.

*Pelléas* also provides *Noroît* with a climax, the duet between Ludovico and Elisa in which the actual dialogue is half-spoken and half-sung in metric repetitions. In a dazzling field of pink blossoms, Ludovico and Elisa chant their sibylline declarations as they continue their search for Giulia's treasure:

The treasure is more than that/the treasure is more than that /Le trésor est  
plus que ça  
I am here and there/I am here and there /Moi, je suis ici et là  
A little farther/a little farther /Encore plus loin, voilà  
I have all the time I need/I have all the time I need/ Et j'ai tout mon temps  
à moi  
I am you and me /Je suis toi et moi  
Me? /Moi?  
Yes, twice me. /Oui, deux fois moi.

The multiple repetition of the word "moi" at the close of this song-like speech recalls *Pelléas*'s response to Mélisande, which follows her ballad from the tower window. She queries *Pelléas* who is passing below, "Qui est là?" to which he responds, "Moi, moi, et moi! Que fais-tu là à la fenêtre en chantant comme un oiseau qui n'est pas d'ici? /What are you doing there at the window singing like a bird far from home?" (III.i, line 194-5). Ludovico and Elisa's chant marks a climactic moment in the film as it mobilizes not only Mélisande's singular solo passage from *Pelléas*, but two other scenes from the opera as

well, which both focus on Golaud's lost treasured ring. The first, Act II scene I from the opera shown earlier, depicts Mélisande and Pelléas by the well where she loses Golaud's ring by tossing it into the air. In the corresponding scene from *Noroît*, Rivette reinvents the opera's mise-en-scène by recasting the amorous figures Ludovico and Elisa against the bright sea-air, where they conspire together, while playing flirtatious games that involve a ring. The ring scenes from both the film and the opera are designed to establish the lovers' amorous complicity. The theme of Ludovico and Elisa's duet not only mobilizes this initial scene from the opera in which Pelléas and Mélisande lose Golaud's treasured ring but the later scene as well, in which both lovers return together to the grotto to search for it.

While the thematic content of Ludovico and Elisa's duet is lost treasure, the scene's spectacular mise-en-scène of pink blossoms borrows directly from Act III sc iii of the opera in which Pelléas takes leave of Golaud and finds rebirth in the fresh sea air and the smell of roses. After his ascent from the castle vaults below, Pelléas exclaims: "And now, sea air! There is a fresh wind, fresh as a bud opening on little green blades. Wait! They have just watered the flowers at the edge of the terrace and the odor of the greenery and of wet roses fills the air" (III. iii, line 240). Could it be mere coincidence that both *Pelléas* and *Noroît* include a pink-blossom scene, and that both film and opera narratives include the lovers' search for a lost treasured object? It is certain that in both productions the pink-blossom scene stands out as the most sensual and colorful, transporting the spectator through song and a celebration of the senses. In both *Pelléas* and *Noroît*, the pink-blossom scene represents an ascent into light and sensual pleasure, a rising movement that in both opera and film precedes a final descent into a dark, tragic moment

where the hero and/or heroine (s) perish. Indeed, Rivette uses dark and light contrast in the film to give form to the opposing forces of vengeance and love, of death and regeneration. The significance of Rivette's mise-en-scène, in which renewal is cast in terms of light and dark, draws directly from Maeterlinck for whom love served as the agency of renewal and light, its source (Smith 111). In *Noroît*, the pink blossom scene discloses the hope of romantic love, the retrieval of Giulia's treasure, and the ultimate restoration of the kingdom with the ascent of its new heiress Elisa. Rivette's use of intense light and lush imagery in this love scene is consistent with Maeterlinck's vision, which corresponds to his own conception of a cinema in which "the principal priorities on the screen would be purely spectacular ones, in the strict sense of the word" (*Nouvelle Critique* 49).

The duet between Ludovico and Elisa remains the only sung exchange in *Noroît*, yet it is representative of other dialogues in the film which are also brief, indefinite, consisting of unanswered questions, unmotivated comments, and unfinished phrases connected by ellipses. In the pink-blossom scene, the film's fantastic dimension is intentionally cultivated through the doubling of dialogue lines, which produces an uncanny, mirroring effect. In fact, Ludovico and Elisa's exchange is representative of others in the film in which the underlying significance of the conversation is understood by the interlocutors, but not by the film spectator who, as François Thomas points out, does not possess the "complete picture" through which he can interpret or understand the mysteries (169). This tone of ambiguity, intentionally cultivated in *Noroît*, recalls the style of *Pelléas* in which incompleteness and indirection were maintained, even justified by the nature of the music. Critic Jacques Dubois has remarked that the characters of

*Pelléas* almost never engage in a completed conversation (487). Indeed, the echoing of dialogue in *Norôit* is everywhere evident in the opera's libretto, in which characters continually repeat the same line twice: "J'attendrai, j'attendrai. . ." "C'est le dernier soir. . . le dernier soir. . ." (*Pelléas*, III.i, IV.iv), "cette pierre est lourde! . . . Elle est plus lourde que moi. . . Elle est plus lourde que tout le monde. Elle est plus lourde que tout." (Yniold, IV.iii), "Ouvrez la fenêtre. . . ouvrez la fenêtre. . ." (*Mélisande*, V.i). As Paul Griffiths has observed, modes of suggestion, doubt, and uncertainty are essential to the opera's characters that reveal themselves only indirectly (284). Debussy's music, full of harmonic ambiguity, reflects and extends the characters' uncertainty.

Similar to Debussy's music in *Pelléas*, music in *Norôit* provides rhythms and lyrics that interpret events in the lives of these characters and intervene in the fiction, yet at the same time remains detached from the story. Rivette found inspiration for music and mise-en-scène in the choreography of Carolyn Carlson, whose rehearsals he had attended at the Paris Opéra. Indeed, he even borrowed several performers from Carlson's dance company: Larrio Ekson (Ludovico) had danced with Carlson in a duo *Il y a juste un instant* (1975) and Anne-Marie Reynaud (Arno, Giulia's lieutenant) also performed with her company (Michel 253).<sup>8</sup> In an interview with Jean Narboni, Rivette describes his experience at the Opéra:

Carolyn Carlson and her dancers were doing their exercises, while at the same time, two musicians, a pianist and a flutist, were there off to one side: there was the body work, the gymnastics of the dancers, while these two musicians continued to play, without the least concern for synchronization, from either group. This rapport pleased me, and I wanted to achieve it, in a certain way in my four films. (*Cahiers no. 327*, 18)

In *Norôit*, the three instrumentalists appear in five different rooms inside the château, where they become integral to the décor. Imitating Carlson's choreographic composition,

Rivette never frames them at the center of the image; a lateral traveling shot typically brings them into the frame, making evident their presence as the scene unfolds. The asynchronous relation between dramatic action and music that Rivette had admired in Carlson determines the staging of music and musicians in the film. For instance, music intervenes in Giulia's nightmare monologue in which she describes her dream to Morag, her shadow:

The ramp was before me, smooth, brilliant,  
I went on, the ground was soft, slippery.  
The snails had left their slime. I continued on up,  
The stairs became more and more. . .  
Difficult. Going on all fours, holding on with my hands.  
I finally reached the top, turned around, and saw the red spot.  
Suddenly, everything collapsed, and the noise. . . the noise woke me up!

While Giulia speaks these lines, the improvised music of the instrumentalists accompanies her description of feelings of dread, terror, and exhaustion. During her recitation, Giulia slowly walks left across the chamber, while a lateral traveling shot follows her and then discovers the three musicians perched by the window. Both Giulia's increasingly agitated voice and the music then move to a crisis, which is precipitated by Morag's response: "You are afraid of the sound of the sea, Madame!" According to Rivette, when the instruments were the most integrated, magical moments would occur spontaneously where a melodic line of dialogue would fuse with an instrumental refrain (*Cahiers no. 327*, 18). Morag's closing remark launches a crescendo conclusion of movement and music, as Giulia walks diagonally across the room to meet Jacob and then departs. This scene forces the spectator to ask the following question: Is music in this scene giving expression to the experiences described in the script, or does the script attempt to name events and feelings that are essentially musical?

*Noroi*t translates *Pelléas*'s sense of mystery. Like Maeterlinck, Rivette intentionally cultivates a fantastic, mysterious atmosphere through the doubling of dialogue lines, oblique elliptical dialogue, repetition of lines; like Debussy, Rivette uses music to heighten the sense of mystery further. As Richard Langham Smith notes, Debussy created mystery through harmonic means: "'Vagrant' progressions or chord-pairs with allegiance to no clear tonal centre are used to portray particularly mysterious moments, often providing a void in which a literary symbol may resonate" (99). Paul Griffiths situates the opera historically as one possible response to the crisis in operatic form that coincided with the revolution in harmony in the decades prior to the First World War (280). As Griffiths points out, opera had previously relied on harmonic forces (280). In both Mozart and in Wagner, resolution in opera had meant harmonic and dramatic resolution, which Griffiths characterizes as follows: "Harmony provides narrative with an engine; narrative provides harmony with an explanation" (280). The increasing irresolution of tonal harmony in the early twentieth century was depleting the narrative of its momentum. One possible response to the crisis in musical representation was Schoenberg's, which was to abandon tonality completely. Debussy's reaction was to embrace the non-directional nature of harmony and to compose an opera of uncertainty, with parallel chords and modal harmony (Griffiths 280). Debussy's opera, a profound if subtle response to the crisis in musical representation, points to a decidedly French musical modernism quite distinct from and, in some respects, directly opposed to the more aggressive modernist project of Schoenberg. To borrow a useful distinction made by Tony Pinkney, we might say that Debussy's modernism is one of "evanescent subjectivity" rather than "extreme objectivity" (6).<sup>9</sup>

### From German and French Opera to Cinema

It was perhaps Debussy's subtle, though nonetheless radical, modernism that appealed to Rivette. As Debussy had intuited that the crisis in harmony demanded the creation of a new music style, similarly, *Noroît*'s operatic style represented Rivette's response to a crisis in the realm of representation. The increased intervention of technical means in the transmission of televised broadcasts and in high capitalist Hollywood spectacle precipitated a postwar crisis in representation, which accelerated following the subsequent crisis of May '68. In the aftermath of May '68, the dual tendencies of Brechtian and cultic theatricality crystallized into respective operatic styles. The cultic theatricality of *Paris nous appartient*, which promised a restoration of aura through recourse to a secularized ritual, culminated in the amplified operatic tendency of *Noroît*, while Brechtian theatricality simultaneously culminated in the opera-film.

During the mid-1970s, critics' attention to radical Brechtian cinema dominated the pages of such journals as *Screen* and *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The operatic tendency exemplified in *Noroît* runs counter to the Brechtian tendency. In a 1968 interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Rivette himself openly dismissed the political potential of a Brechtian cinema:

I wondered quite a bit whether one could create a "distanciated" cinema, and basically, I don't think so. The cinema is necessarily fascination and rape, that is how it acts on people; it is something disturbing, something you see in darkness, where you project the same things as in dreams: it is on this common ground where the truth resides. (my translation, *Cahiers* no. 204, 21)

In this passage, Rivette seems to touch upon the fundamental difficulty of transferring Brechtian theory to film. As Wolin points out, epic theater sought to "freeze the normal flow of events in life in order to subject them to an intensive process of critical scrutiny"

(152).<sup>10</sup> This structuring device of interruption is designed to achieve an effect of astonishment, which as Benjamin reminds us, is opposed to the entranced response of the spectator to traditional auratic works of art (151). The alienation effect was originally conceptualized around the copresence of the actor and of the spectator in the same space and time, whereas at the cinema, the object and actors are already distanced as representations. In "What is Epic Theater?" Benjamin moves beyond this notion of presence used to distinguish between the two art forms to insist that there does, in fact, exist a preestablished harmony between cinematic technique and the Brechtian epic. Indeed, the experience of shock that the Brechtian drama sought to impart to the audience through the strategy of interruption was, as Benjamin points out, already integral to film form. Benjamin claims:

Like the pictures in a film, epic theater moves in spurts. Its basic form is that of the shock with which the single, well-defined situations of the play collide. The songs, the captions, the lifeless conventions set off one situation from another. This brings about intervals which, if anything, impair the illusion of the audience and paralyze its readiness for empathy. (153)

The precise nature of the relation between epic theater and film form pinpointed by Benjamin underscores the difficulties inherent in European filmmakers' attempts to translate the Brechtian device of interruption into film form. As Nora Alter points out Brecht himself was well aware of such inherent difficulties.<sup>11</sup> It is indeed unfortunate that Brecht's own theory of film, as evidenced in his film *Kuhle Wampe* (1932), is generally disregarded or dismissed as "simplistic and ineffective" by those seeking to establish a direct parallel between his theories of film production and those of theatrical practice (Alter 77). Such critics, as Alter reminds us, fail to distinguish between Brecht's theories of theater and those of film (77-78).



In an effort to remain attentive to the specificities of the film medium, Ishaghpour theorizes an alternative form, which he refers to as the Aristotelian epic film, which would not have to disengage itself through interruption from and against dramatic form (*Image* 39). The operatic style of *Noroît* embodies the Aristotelian epic form proposed by Ishaghpour. Rivette's film borrows its Aristotelian dramatic form from both Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* and from its veiled source *Pelléas*, both sources determining beginning, middle, and closing scenes within their respective theatrical registers. While these two voices of theater and opera begin and end in unison, they diverge in between the opening and closing scenes, working both with and against each other. This dynamic interaction of double voices in *Noroît* invites the spectator to move back and forth between separate theatrical registers—be it opera or theater. Thus, in contrast to the unified effect of traditional Aristotelian drama, the film retains an epic quality, which Brecht defines in the following passage:

The bourgeois novel in the last century developed much that was "dramatic," by which was meant the strong centralization of the story, a momentum that drew the separate parts into a common relationship [. . .]. The epic writer [Alfred] Doblin provided an excellent criterion when he said that with an epic work, as opposed to a dramatic, one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable of life. (70)

As in epic dramaturgy, in *Noroît* the intertextual tableaux of opera and theater can be extracted from the complete work and read as discrete and autonomous entities. Although the film conforms to a traditional tripartite dramatic structure, it is not driven by the dynamics of Aristotelian dramaturgy, which elicit an emotional catharsis and empathetic identification with the characters and the work (41). Rather than linear Aristotelian teleology, in *Noroît* we have a field of intertextual forces in which the sheer

physicality of sound and spectacle supersedes narration and induces an entranced participation, a pleasurable investment in the text. To suggest an operatic style, the image of a monumental world of objects and events is solicited for itself in the film. Indeed, Rivette has affirmed that the cinema's mission should be to recapture monumentality through spectacle:

I'm impressed by films that impose themselves visually through their monumentality. There is a weight to what is on screen, and which is there on the screen as a statue, a building, or a huge beast might be. . . . These are films that tend towards the ritual, towards the ceremonial, the oratorio, the theatrical, the magical, not in the mystical so much as the more devotional sense of the word as in the celebration of mass. Rite or ceremonial or monumental. In films, in texts, and in theatrical performances, the accent should be placed on the elements in which the spectacle itself (or the fiction) is represented. (*Nouvelle Critique* 49)

In *Norôit*, the power of plastic expression moves the spectator away—without the distanciation of Brecht—from the immediate action while integrating him/her into the totality of a secularized ritual. What the operatic tendency of *Norôit* offers is an aesthetic of “spectacular” presence that pays homage to the unfinished opera-film of poet-cinéaste Cocteau.<sup>12</sup>

The postwar crisis of representation precipitated by an intervention of technical means in the production and reception of images demanded a new cinematic style. Rivette responded with the creation of an operatic style of uncertainty and mystery. Debussy's opera *Pelléas*, which had provided a radically innovative response to the crisis in tonality at the turn of the century, provided Rivette with a stylistic idiom that enabled him to respond to a similar crisis in cinematic form. The modernist crisis in tonality paralleled the contemporary crisis in representation: As the operatic style of Debussy profoundly opposes the negative aesthetic of Schoenberg, which necessitated the

complete rejection of tonal harmony, so does the operatic style of *Norôit* directly oppose the anti-aesthetic tendency of Brechtian cinema, which was formulated in conscious opposition to the affirmative character of high capitalist Hollywood cinema. Debussy shaped Rivette's response to the crisis in representation, and in similar fashion, Schoenberg profoundly influenced filmmakers Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's conception of their Brechtian opera-film *Moses and Aaron*.

Straub and Huillet's film production of Schoenberg's opera *Moses and Aaron* (1975), based on an Old Testament tale, represented the zenith of the Brechtian anti-aesthetic trend in cinema. Jeremy Tambling characterizes Straub and Huillet's approach to Schoenberg's opera libretto as Brechtian, pointing out that the directors had recourse to the separation of elements that stripped away anything mythic or mystificatory (148). The singers sang on the set, an open-air amphitheatre in which the stationary, empty oval space of ancient theatrics drew attention to the non-naturalism of the work, foregrounding its character as artifact (149). The Brechtian direct sound and imaging strategy in *Moses and Aaron* represented the strongest form of materialist cinema, which was heralded on its release in full-page spreads of *Cahiers du Cinéma*. In "Oblique Angles: The Film Projects of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet," Turim speculates as to possible reasons for this accolade: "Straub and Huillet are the filmmakers that film theory [. . .] desired, for they develop an ideologically motivated process of signification" (337). The opera-film can be viewed in retrospect as the desired response to the crisis in representation, which was highly publicized, anticipated by the intellectual press, and finally, politically anesthetized. The canonization of Straub and Huillet's Brechtian opera-film *Moses and Aaron* within the intellectual and academic press of the mid-1970s

would finally crystallize into a rigid discursive facade, which would conceal the veiled operatic style of *Noroît* from public view.

Rivette's adaptation of Debussy's opera not only reflects his enduring preoccupation with the relation between theater and cinema but must also be viewed as part of a personal response, Rivette's tribute to the legacy of poet-cinéaste Jean Cocteau, who in turn, pays homage to Debussy. Rivette explores the legacy of operatic style, which determines the parameters of personal and generic recollection in his film. Indeed, Rivette reminds us: "All films are about the theatre, there is no other subject. [ . . . ] If you take a subject which deals with the theatre to any extent at all, you're dealing with the truth of the cinema: you're carried along" (my translation, *Cahiers* no. 204, 15). In *Noroît*, Rivette transforms a closed memory associated with operatic ritual into an open memory, the singular experience of the stage into a universal one. Just as opera ensures the spectator's centripetal movement towards interiority and the imaginary of the past, film encourages a concurrent centrifugal, exploratory movement directed towards the world and the present (Moindrot 20). The essence of mystery and ambiguity found in *Pelléas* and captured in *Noroît* remains consistent with Rivette's early theoretical speculations, when he affirmed that an ontological mystery forms the essence of cinema and of all the arts. The tone of *Noroît* that intentionally maintains a sense of mystery is attributable, in part, to Rivette's theoretical convictions; the film's fantastic dimension that is created through verse and music is inspired by *Pelléas*, Debussy's opera of uncertainty.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rivette borrowed his film tetralogy's title from Gérard de Nerval's publication *Les Filles du feu* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994) in which the celebrated poem *El Desdichado*

(*The Disinherited*) appeared in 1854. That Rivette borrows his title from this nineteenth-century poet is highly significant, as Nervalian verse resonates with the musicality of magic formulas, their power of suggestion surpassing their intelligible content. For Nerval "dreams are another life" in which "the supernatural world becomes available to us" *XIX Siècle: Les Grands Auteurs Français*, André Lagarde and Laurent Michard (Paris: Bordas, 1985), 272. The everyday world and memory are transfigured through dream in Nerval; the memory of the poet thereby moves beyond temporal boundaries, and his individual past merges with that of all humanity to proclaim a mystical future. Such preoccupations would greatly influence both the Symbolists and the Surrealists. Indeed, the poet's presence is especially evident in Rivette's cycle of films, particularly *Norôit*.

<sup>2</sup> At first glance, Cocteau's absolute fidelity to Debussy's original vision would seem inexplicable in view of his harsh criticism of the French composer's work published in *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* (1918). Kenneth Silver has pointed out in "Jean Cocteau and the Image d'Épinal: An Essay on Realism and Naïveté," *Jean Cocteau and the French Scene*, ed. Arthur King Peters (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984) that Cocteau had insistently criticized what he termed "debussyisme" in his early essays on music theory published in *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* (87). Yet he later confessed to correspondent and close friend Jacques Maritain his own profound sense of regret for his role in the attack on Debussy in *Correspondance* (1923-1963) *avec la Lettre à Jacques Maritain et la Réponse à Jean Cocteau* (1926) (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1993), 301.

<sup>3</sup> Rivette's use of Tourneur is noted within varied contexts, such as Jonathan Rosenbaum and Michael Graham's analysis of *Norôit* in *Sight and Sound* (Autumn 1975): 234-39, François Thomas's discussion of direct sound practice in *Norôit* in "Les Films 'parallèles,'" in *La Règle du jeu*, ed. Jean Esselinck (Turin: Centre Culturel Français de Turin, 1991), 71-8 and Rivette's own commentary in "Entretien avec Jacques Rivette," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 327 (Sept 1981): 8-21.

<sup>4</sup> David Roberts distinguishes between the Aristotelian dramatic theater and the non-Aristotelian (epic) theater in terms of the latter's adherence to a Galileian dynamics of space and time.

<sup>5</sup> When assessing the impact of theatrical styles on his work (personal interview, 16 June 1999), Rivette never openly credits Maeterlinck. He does, however, acknowledge his profound debt to the avant-garde theater of Antonin Artaud, whose own admiration for the Symbolist dramatist Maeterlinck is unequivocally attested to in an early essay from the 1920s entitled, "Maurice Maeterlinck" in *Artaud on Theatre*, ed. Claude Schumacher (London: Methuen Drama, 1989), 9-12. Artaud's expression of respect for Maeterlinck in this early essay had undoubtedly sparked Rivette's interest, providing Rivette with yet another possible source of motivation for his later film adaptation of *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

<sup>6</sup> Green explains in *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1995) that Celtic goddesses had the ability to "shape-shift" and thereby adopt a human or animal form at will as a way of displaying their power (42).

<sup>7</sup> In *Celtic Goddesses* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), Green claims: "The idea of sovereignty personified as a divine female is an extremely persistent tradition in Irish myth" (70).

<sup>8</sup> American dancer and choreographer Carolyn Carlson followed the intrepid course set by Martha Graham, Isadora Duncan, and Ruth Saint Denis, whose careers had been strongly influenced by Eastern philosophy and aesthetics. In 1974, Carlson was employed by l'Opéra de Paris where she produced a series of dreamlike spectacles based on the projection of interior states or childhood impressions. For instance, in her production of *Sablier Prison* (Opéra, 1976) dancers (Anne-Marie Reynaud among them) experience the passage of time in the glimmer of northern, boreal light. Perhaps it was the rehearsals for this Carlson production that had inspired Rivette's selection of both the location and title for *Noroît*.

<sup>9</sup> Expanding upon Roland Barthes' observations in *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), Pinkney adds that after the revolutions of 1848, realist dialectics split apart into an "evanescent subjectivity" or the "extreme objectivity" of photo-realism (6).

<sup>10</sup> In chap. 5 "Benjamin and Brecht" of *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), Wolin provides an excellent overview of Brecht's theory of theater in the context of his analysis of the Brecht-Benjamin alliance.

<sup>11</sup> Nora Alter in "The Politics and Sounds of Everyday Life in *Kuhle Wampe*" discusses the innovative strategies Brecht employs in his only film *Kuhle Wampe*, which was released in May 1932. Alter argues that Brecht was keenly aware of the material (and historical) specificity of the two media, theater and cinema. In her analysis of *Kuhle Wampe*, Alter examines the way the film blurs the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, the function of sound, and the problematization of identification. The manner in which Brecht uses these techniques in his film represents a very sharp break with the medium of theater. Alter argues that Brecht uses film to do what theater cannot, "namely to represent everyday life and through shots of large crowds, a mobilized collectivity" (80).

<sup>12</sup> The mythic, fairy tale dimension of *Noroît* is traceable not only to Cocteau's décor for the 1963 production of *Pelléas* but to his film masterpiece *La Belle et la Bête* (1946). Indeed, the circumstances surrounding the production of Cocteau's film classic closely resemble those of *Noroît*. *La Belle et la Bête* was an adaptation of a famous French fairy tale written in 1757. Its fantastic story ran counter to the post-Liberation taste for realism, which reflected the impact of Italian Neo-realism in France. As Susan Hayward has observed in "La Belle et la Bête," *History Today* 46, no. 7 (July 1996): 44,

Cocteau's scenario seemed an irrelevance within the climate of postwar concerns; *La Belle et la Bête* was regarded as detached from the sociopolitical climate of the time. Films such as René Clément's *La Bataille du Rail* (1945), a film about the heroic resistance of the railway workers during the Occupation, were succeeding both at the box office and critically at Cannes. In essence, Cocteau's film presented a challenge to the cinematic *zeitgeist* of its time, patriotic realism; in the same way, Rivette's *Norôit* challenged Brechtian cinema of the 1970s.

CHAPTER 6  
MOVING BACKSTAGE: FROM TAXI-DANCE HALL TO  
DEPRESSION MUSICAL IN *HAUT BAS FRAGILE*

Nothing can be done for the castaways  
who ride the great wave  
that rocks them to mysterious islands.  
Without a craft, without a raft,  
without leaving land,  
the castaways wander.

— Kent Cokenstok and F. Bréant; *Les Nauvragés volontaires*

*Haut bas fragile* returns to and reinvents the kind of fascination that as Tom Gunning contends was prevalent in early cinema as well as in certain genres such as the musical (64). *Haut bas fragile* mobilizes multiple dance styles—the participatory aesthetic of the taxi-dance hall, the fluid rhythm and rhyme patterns of the depression era backstage musical, as well as the reflexivity of the 1950s MGM musical—in order to establish a musical liaison between the everyday world and the ceremonial space of performance. Indeed, the dance aesthetic of the film is based on diverse American and French theatrical conventions that overlap with each other. New York popular culture of the 1920s—the music, song, and dance subculture portrayed in Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Capricorn*—provides one source of the film’s performance aesthetic. The film’s choreographed dance numbers also invoke Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly musicals, such as *Top Hat* (1935), *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), and *The Band Wagon* (1953). The film does not, however, offer Hollywood’s vision of the musical performance. Rather than producing the image of a utopian reality, the musical numbers of *Haut bas fragile*



accentuate the film's disjointed tone. The occasional narrative intrigues that engage the three women become mere pretexts for musical performances in which our attention is focused on the pleasure of sensual body movements of the characters that rock rhythmically or pose gratuitously as required by the demands of the music. *Haut bas fragile* mobilizes American dance and musical styles to produce the abstract pleasure associated with an avant-garde performance aesthetic.

### From the New Wave to the Nineties

Rivette's fascination with labyrinthine design, which was evident in his first feature *Paris nous appartient*, surfaces again in *Haut bas fragile* (1995), structuring the crisscross pattern of city streets, the maze of library stacks, and the empty corridors and stairwells that line anonymous apartment buildings. In the celebrated 1968 interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Rivette isolates the importance of décor in his first feature:

That is also what I still like about *Paris nous appartient*, the labyrinth that the décors create among themselves, the idea that one brings away from the film, of a sort of series of settings with relationships between them—some cut off, others communicating, others that are optional itineraries—and people moving about like mice inside these labyrinths, ending up in culs-de-sac or caught nose to nose. Then at the end it all vanishes and there's nothing left but this lake and some birds flying away [. . .] (16)

*Haut bas fragile*'s décor points to the labyrinthine fixity of institutional structures, such as the Paris streets that imprison Ninon in a low-paid job, or the library stacks that reinforce Ida's sense of her own dispossession, or the empty, clinical apartment buildings that encase the upper middle-class Louise, rendering her infantilized and helpless, a prisoner of her father's over-protectiveness. Rivette's film chronicles the daily lives of three women, Louise, Ninon, and Ida, who live in Paris. Characterized as a "sleepwalker," Louise (Marianne Denicourt) is recovering from an accident that left her

in a coma; Ninon (Natalie Richard) is a delivery girl perpetually traveling from address to address on her mobylette or her roller blades; Ida (Laurence Côte), a librarian, searches continually for the source of a song she thinks she hears or heard before she was born. The occasional intrigues that engage these three women, such as the mysterious "double dealings" of the *Backstage* gang or the missing documents discrediting Louise's father, become mere pretexts for musical performances that seduce characters who meet briefly and then disperse. Certain intrigues possess intertextual resonance. Ninon's theft of the documents implicating Louise's father from the desk in Monsieur Roland's studio is a citation of the scene in *Out 1* in which Juliet Berto's character Frédérique filches letters from the desk of a chess player (Jacques Doniol-Valcroze), which implicate him—and her, by extension—in the conspiracy of the *Treize*.<sup>1</sup>

Music in the film provides all three women with the means to oppose those forces that threaten to contain or erase them. The regenerative role of music in *Haut bas fragile* recalls its function in *Paris nous appartient*, where the missing tape "Music of the Apocalypse" is essential to theater director Gerard Lenz's successful staging of *Périclès*. Music in the film becomes the sole element that will allow his theater troupe to achieve an artistic identity. Similarly in *Haut bas fragile*, a missing melody motivates Ida's search through apartment stairwells and Paris record stores. She alone hears the song "Mon amour perdu" (My Lost Love): "I will do anything to find you again, to see you and hold you again" (*Je ferai tout pour te retrouver, pour te revoir et te serrer*). During these interludes, the lost refrain becomes associated with the adopted Ida's obsessive desire to retrieve her sense of selfhood. Music presents the possibility of a feminine identity, *in absentia*. This use of music can be traced to what Loubinoux describes as "le

chant dans le chant" (chant within the chant), an operatic form where characters are "inhabited, haunted by some archaic song that awakens strange resonance in them, which exercises a mysterious power of fascination and precipitates peculiar exchanges between them" (86). Loubinoux cites three archetypal examples: the ballad of Senta (*le Vaisseau fantôme*, Wagner, 1843), the ballad "of the king of Thulé" (*Faust*, Gounod, 1859), and the "chanson du saule" ("song of the willow tree") (*Otello*, Verdi, 1887). While each of these three instances of "the chant within the chant" possesses a distinctive personality that is representative of its respective national school, each explores the same region of mythic memory, which Loubinoux affirms, is that of feminine destiny (87). All three episodes involve a woman troubled by an inexplicable dilemma, whose introspective reflection is supplanted by an irrational need to sing an old melody. In similar fashion, Rivette's character Ida first reflects on her own insolvable dilemma: "Behind me there is nothing. As if I had no past. A real black hole. As if my legs had no feet." These words of solitary introspection, which Ida begins to sing while observing herself in her bedroom mirror, soon becomes allied with her obsession with finding the source of the old song, "Mon amant perdu," that only she hears. Rivette's reliance on "the chant within the chant" in his film recalls its function in those operas by Verdi, Wagner, and Gounod, where the contingent world of the everyday opposes the mythic world associated with the chant and the consequent quest for the woman's identity. In both Rivette's film and the three operas, the "chant within the chant" emerges from a primitive, archaic universe, which subtends a superficial world of social conventions and hypocrisy.

Similar to music's role, movement serves all three women as a source of identity and liberation. The mobility of Ninon's roller blades and mobylette extricates her from

the confinement of economic strictures; dance reawakens Louise from her comatose immobility and releases her from the oppressive consequences of paternal surveillance. *Paris nous appartient* and *Haut bas fragile* both chronicle a Paris summer—four decades apart. The occasional appearances of *Backstage* singer Anna Karina, feminine icon *par excellence* of the New Wave, make reference to her musical performances within a 1960s cinema “de la jeunesse.” At her nightclub *Sarah Saloon*, Karina reinvents old song and dance routines from Jean-Luc Godard’s paean to the American musical *Une Femme est une femme*/A Woman Is a Woman (1961) as well as dance numbers from his later films *Bande à part*/Band of Outsiders (1964) and *Pierrot le fou* (1965). Indeed, the role of Angéla from *Une Femme est une femme* in which Karina performs at the strip club Zodiac but aspires to Hollywood stardom, “in a musical by Gene Kelly, with choreography by Bob Fosse,” is recirculated within *Haut bas fragile*’s contemporary 1990s décor.

### **The Dance Aesthetic: From Taxi-dance Halls to the Backstage Musical**

In a personal interview, Rivette intimated that the club *Backstage* was modeled on the New York taxi-dance hall, which became popular following the First World War. Taxi-dance halls, as social historian Irving Allen notes in *The City in Slang*, were also called “closed dance halls,” for they were closed to women patrons (172). Male patrons of the clubs would buy long strips of dance tickets, entitling them to a dime-a-dance with any available taxi dancer. In his preeminent study of the urban dance hall *The Taxi-Dance Hall* (1932), sociologist Paul G. Cressey provides this description of the taxi dancer: “Like the taxi-driver with his cab, she is for public hire and is paid in proportion to the time spent and the services rendered” (3). The taxi-dance hall that Cressey

describes invariably incorporated the name of "dancing school" or "dancing academy" into its title to give the impression that systematic instruction in dancing was given (4). The dual dimension of the taxi-dance hall as a commercial and instructional institution is captured in Rogers and Hart's song "Ten Cents a Dance" from the musical *Simple Simon* (1930). Ella Fitzgerald memorably interprets its lyrics, crooning:

I work at the Palace Ballroom/but gee, that Palace is cheap.  
When I get back to my chilly hall room/I'm much too tired to sleep.  
I'm one of those lady teachers/a beautiful hostess, you know  
One that the Palace features/at exactly a dime a throw.

The dance hall described by Cressey was a long narrow room with a low ceiling, which could entertain several hundred men during any single evening (6). On the platform at the end of the hall, a group of four or five musicians would play such popular tunes as "Baby Face, You've Got the Cutest Little Baby Face" or the snappy "I Like Your Size, I Like Your Eyes, Who Wouldn't?" At the beginning of each musical number, the taxi-girl received a ticket from the patron, which she tore in half, giving one part of it to the ticket collector and storing the other half under the hem of her silk hose (Cressey 6). At the end of the evening, she redeemed the tickets from the management for a nickel each. As Cressey points out, taxi-dancers were often called "nickel hoppers," as they actually earned one half the dime ticket (17).

The phenomenon of the taxi-dance hall followed the nickelodeon's widespread, unprecedented success during the first decade of the century. Although separated by more than a decade, there are striking similarities between the two cultural phenomena. According to historian Kathy Peiss, like the taxi-dance hall, the nickelodeon was frequently a transformed dance hall, which was cheaply rented and re-equipped to accommodate the public (146). The infectious spread of nickelodeons and taxi-dance

halls throughout urban America marked a decisive break in the pattern of working-class amusements. Initially, both the nickelodeon and the taxi-dance hall had been regarded as illicit forms of entertainment; later, however, both would emerge as commercialized big business enterprises and ultimately, as theaters of the masses.<sup>2</sup> Film historian Robert Allen observes that most nickelodeons, like most taxi-dance halls, were located near large working-class and middle-class populations (174). Neither form of commercial recreation appeared in affluent neighborhoods. Taxi-dance halls and nickel theaters were usually located at interstitial areas of mobility, such as tenement districts where small apartments, furnished rooms, and inexpensive residential hotels predominated, thus offering a ready-made clientele (Cressey 232). These places of amusement were tinged with an element of social danger, partly because of the inevitable commingling of classes or ethnicities in less expensive venues.<sup>3</sup>

Taxi-dance halls arose from the synthesis of opposed dancing traditions, representing the convergence of the disreputable "Barbary Coast dance hall" with the respectable bona fide dancing school. The colorful Barbary Coast dance hall was originally associated with the whoring and drinking of sailors on leave in San Francisco and gold prospectors from the Gold Rush of 1849 (Allen 172). In *The City That Was*, Will Irwin describes the picturesque vice associated with these notorious dance halls:

Hell broke out in the Eye Wink Dance Hall. The trouble was started by a sailor known as Kanaka Pete, who lived at the What Cheer House, over a woman known as Iodoform Kate. [ . . . ] The by-product of his gun made holes in the front of the Eye Wink, which were proudly kept as souvenirs, and were probably there until it went out in the fire. This was low life, and the lowest of the low. (qtd. in Cressey 179)

The abolition of the Barbary Coast halls in 1913 resulted in the appearance of a new form of dance hall that employed the ticket-a-dance system. Due to this new commercial

arrangement, these dance halls were slightly more select in both clientele and deportment. The ticket-a-dance system was imported into the New York dancing school circuit from San Francisco. New York dance masters welcomed the ten-cent-a-lesson plan as a new way of running a dancing school that would make it possible for the students to dance with different instructors. The ticket-a-lesson plan was initially combined with the line-up system of the conventional dancing school. The girls would line up at the beginning of each dance, and male patrons were obliged to take the girl at the head of the line. This new hybrid dance school adjusted itself by gradual and almost imperceptible degrees to financial imperatives, catering to those patrons seeking dance partners, rather than to those desiring dancing instruction. As Cressey points out, instructional features such as practice rooms and graded classes were dispensed with as unprofitable, while the business persisted in its attenuated form, still calling itself a dance academy (189). Beneath its respectable institutional guise as an "academy," the taxi-dance hall actually cultivated an alternative counter cultural community open to diverse nationalities, races, and age groups. Such diversity was the real crux of the anxiety about taxi-dancing. Its varied clientele participated in the ritual of music and movement, the sensual pleasure of the dancers' performance.

To some extent, the community of the taxi-dance hall participated in the leisure culture of the dance palace, which permitted working-class women to define a style that in some respects subverted the traditional bases of their dependency—as dutiful daughters within the patriarchal immigrant family and as submissive workers within a capitalist economy (Peiss 187). The cultural formation transmitted in the dance hall offered young working-class women space for social experimentation, personal freedom,

and unsupervised fun. A symbol of this new woman, ballroom dancer Irene Castle became one of the most written-about women of the period, according to Lewis Erenberg, and a model for dancers (159). Revising the nineteenth century's view of women as frail and maternal, Castle symbolized the energetic, free, and youthful woman of the twentieth century (Erenberg 166). "Dancing is the language of the body," Castle wrote, proclaiming that "It is, as in social dancing, the exponent *par excellence*, of the joy of living" (qtd. in Erenberg 166). Dancing helped the modern woman to achieve freedom, Castle thought, for she would find a release from the psychological and physical restraints of the past through body expression (Erenberg 167). Through dancing, women, according to Castle, could recreate and expand themselves along new lines. Castle danced black dances, made fabulous sums of money, associated with the wealthy and with blacks, and advocated that women could publicly cross the barrier of the double standard and enjoy life more equally with men (Erenberg 169). Through dancing, she conveyed images of rebellion from the social constraints of the day. As reformers and social critics decried the social danger associated with urban amusements and city streets, Irene Castle offered an image of women as youthful gamines who could not possibly be subject to the tragedies the reformers feared (Erenberg 168). By the 1920s, argues Miriam Hansen, "women's status within the public sphere [had] shifted from a discourse of domesticity to an updated ideology of consumption, superimposing models of feminine virtue and female skills with appeals of pleasure, glamour and leisure, of sensuality, eroticism, and exoticism" (10). During the first two decades of the century, the new leisure culture launched by exhibition dancers such as Irene Castle had facilitated



the transition to a new ideology that legitimized pleasure, sexuality, and the expenditure of impulses.

Rivette was familiar with New York popular culture of the 1920s, particularly its music, song, and dance subculture, which had inspired the work of American expatriate writer Henry Miller. Miller was among those who frequented New York taxi-dance halls during the 1920s. He met his wife June at Wilson's Dance Hall in 1923 where she worked as a taxi-girl. As Miller's biographer Henry Ferguson points out, June served the young writer as a symbol, a mythic creature who represented the alluring and seductive side of the American dream (79). In *Tropic of Capricorn*, Miller's description of the Roseland dance hall is based on the couple's courtship at Wilson's:

Enter very calmly, Henry, and keep your eyes peeled! And I enter [the Roseland] as per instructions on velvet toes, checking my hat and urinating a little as a matter of course, then slowly redesigning the stairs and sizing up the taxi girls all diaphanously gowned, powdered, perfumed, looking fresh and alert but probably bored as hell and leg weary. [. . .] At the rail which fences off the floor I stand and watch them sailing around. This is no harmless recreation. . . this is serious business. At each end of the floor there is a sign reading "No Improper Dancing Allowed" [. . .] *Keep moving, Henry. Keep your mind on the music.* (104-5)

The circumscribed performance space of the taxi-dance hall encouraged a clandestine voyeurism that allowed the spectator to transgress social boundaries vicariously. In this passage, Miller describes his voyeuristic encounter that accords primacy to visual spectacle:

Most of the two hundred men in the hall do not seem to be dancing. They stand about the edge of the dance space or slouch down into the single row of chairs ranged along the wall and gaze fixedly upon the performers. No one speaks. No one laughs. It is a strangely silent crowd. [. . .] Twice as many men ogle as dance. They jostle each other for room along the side line and gradually, involuntarily, they encroach upon the dance space. "Back to the line, boys, back to the line!" (7)



Figure 6.1. Reginald Marsh, *Diana Dancing Academy* (1939). Courtesy of The William Benton Museum of Art.

The anonymity of the dance hall encounter allowed the onlooker to project himself into different roles, keeping his real identity a disguise. As Cressey points out, “the dance hall becomes a means of escape from the restrictions upon conduct which, while necessary in a well-ordered society, nevertheless are felt [ . . . ] to be oppressive” (241). This capacity to project the self into alternative theatrical roles was not limited, according to Cressey, to patrons but also included the taxi-girls themselves. Each dancer would adopt a “professional” name that was suggestive of her new self-conception. Such transformations from “real” to “professional” names were indicative: Alma Heisler to Helene de Valle, Eleanor Hedman to Gloria Garden, Alice Borden to Wanda Wang and

Mary Maranowski to Jean Jouette (Cressey 97). While the "professionalism" required of the taxi-girl is often associated with prostitution, Rivette's references to this subculture in his film are designed to subvert the sentimental vision of the heterosexual couple offered in the Hollywood musical. Rather than affirming those values associated with a respectable bourgeois culture, Rivette's dance hall aesthetic offers an implicit critique of these values, providing the spectator with a pedagogical dance lesson. Indeed, taxi-girls also used the taxi-dance hall as an outlet for taboo homoerotic fantasies. Cressey observes that when business was dull, unchartered girls were free to "frolic together over the floor," their skirts swishing about beneath the pleasurable gaze of sideline spectators, who would "gape and reach for more tickets" (7).

For Miller, the taxi-dance hall represented more than a transgressive erotic spectacle. Here, Miller describes his hallucinatory encounter with the nymphomaniac taxi-girl who inspired his vision of the American soul:

[Paula] She has the loose, jaunty swing and perch of the double-barreled sex, all her movements radiating from the groin, always in equilibrium, always ready to flow, to wind and twist and clutch, the eyes going tic-toc, the toes twitching and twinkling, the flesh rippling like a lake furrowed by a breeze. This is the incarnation of the hallucination of sex, the sea nymph squirming in the maniac's arms. I watch the two of them as they move spasmodically inch by inch around the floor; they move like an octopus working up a rut. [...] In the golden marshmallow dream of happiness, in the dance of the sodden piss and gasoline, the great soul of the American continent gallops like an octopus, all the sails unfurled, the hatches down, the engine whirring like a dynamo. The great dynamic soul caught in the click of the camera's eye, in the heat of rut, bloodless as a fish, slippery as mucus, the soul of the people miscegenating on the sea floor, popeyed with longing, harrowed with lust. (107)

In *Haut bas fragile*, Rivette refashions Miller's Roseland taxi-dance hall to match the dimensions of his *Backstage* dance club, reimagining Miller's nymphomaniac taxi-girl to fit the dimensions of his character Ninon.<sup>4</sup> The myth of the American taxi-girl is

musically interlaced with French film tradition in *Haut bas fragile*, for Rivette borrows his character's name "Ninon" from the song "Pauvre Petit Coeur de Ninon" at the close of Jean Renoir's *La Bête humaine* (1938), the Zola adaptation. Providing an ironic counterpoint to the film's narrative, the song's lyrics tell the story of a fictitious bewitching girl who breaks men's hearts. Indirectly this song refers to the film's heroine Séverine (Simone Simon) whose sensual allure drives the crazed train engineer Jacques Lantier (Jean Gabin) to commit murder.<sup>5</sup> Although the film aurally invokes Zola's obsessive character Lantier, it is Miller's feverish voyeuristic engagement with the taxi-dancer at the Roseland that bears marked resemblance to Rivette's mobile camera eye and enlists our entranced participation in Ninon's dance performances at *Backstage*.



Figure 6.2. Ninon as a taxi-dancer, *Haut bas fragile*.

Indeed, it seems clear that Miller's portrait of 1920s New York subculture does surface later in *Haut bas fragile*—Rivette's film portrait of contemporary Paris that paradoxically draws on Miller's expatriate literary vision of America.

*Haut bas fragile*'s theatrical staging of musical numbers does not simply reflect the New York dance and cinema subculture of the 1920s, but simultaneously refers to the Hollywood "backstage" musical through its incorporation of carefully choreographed dance numbers. The film's opening scene sets up the semantic elements of the taxi-dance hall narrative, introducing Ninon as a taxi-girl who aggressively demands her cut of wages from the management. She definitively decides to seek new employment after she witnesses her boss violently stab a lecherous patron in a back lot. As a delivery girl, presumably of those packages marked "haut bas fragile" (UP/DOWN/FRAGILE) or (TOP/BOTTOM/FRAGILE), Ninon initiates a romantic interlude with Monsieur Roland, a set designer. As the unsuspecting Roland enters the doorway of the delivery service, Ninon brazenly kisses him, distracting the attention of others and deflecting their suspicion of her following their discovery of a theft from the open cash box. The initial scene at Roland's studio introduces the semantic elements of the backstage musical. The oppositional semantics of reality and art evidenced in Roland's studio décor originates in the early 1930s backstage musical. A product of the depression era economy, some early 1930s backstage musicals revealed daily life as a constant fight against joblessness and hunger. This lackluster existence is balanced by the joy of production numbers, in which screen characters as well as the audience are permitted to temporarily forget their real situation. Space that is marked off and segregated from the world is reserved for artistic presentation. The characters break out of the normal world into a realm of performance

and art, where stylization and rhythm provide a sense of community and beauty absent from the real world.

The Hollywood musical is characterized by the audio dissolve, which, as Rick Altman observes in *The American Film Musical*, is a technique that makes possible the seamless passage from the diegetic track of conversation to the music track of orchestral accompaniment (63). In the musical, the audio dissolve transports the spectator from a realm of unrelenting reality (action produces sound) to a magical world (music produces action).<sup>6</sup> In the atelier dance number between Ninon and Roland, Rivette experiments with a variation of the audio dissolve. The manner in which the scene shifts from diegetic sound without music to nondiegetic music without diegetic sound is modeled on Fred Astaire's use of rhythmic walking and talking as a bridge (Altman 67). Throughout Astaire's career, this technique remains one of his hallmarks. In his first song/dance of *Top Hat* (1935), Astaire slips from conversation with Edward Everett Horton into song, as Altman observes, "simply by rhythmifying and melodizing his voice patterns" (67). In similar fashion, Roland and Ninon exchange half-sung lyrics based on metrical repetitions. Their interchange, which in French plays upon the words "Per-tur-bé" and "Géné," translates as follows:

Ninon: On est tous les deux, perturbés./ We're both dis-tur-bed.  
 Roland: C'est un mot ridicule: perturbé./ Ridiculous word: dis-tur-bed.  
 Ninon: Complètement ridicule: perturbé./ Totally ridiculous: dis-tur-bed.  
 Roland: Perturbé./ dis-tur-bed.  
 Ninon: Perturbé./ dis-tur-bed.  
 Ninon: Je suis gênée./ I'm flustered.  
 Roland: Vous êtes gênée./ You are flustered.  
 Ninon: Vous n'êtes pas gêné, vous?/ You're not flustered?  
 Roland: Je suis très gêné./ I'm very flustered.  
 Ninon: Gêné et perturbé?/ Flustered and disturbed?

During this exchange, the linguistic bonds that produce meaning become relaxed, allowing words to return to their primal characteristics of rhythm and rhyme. Instead of ideas, words become sounds and thus, as Altman notes in his convincing analysis, shift into their proper place in a world ruled by song (70). By melodizing their voice patterns, the couple's movement from diegetic conversation to nondiegetic song is made continuous and imperceptible. Their speech grows more and more rhythmical, thus calling forth and justifying, as it were, the entrance of the musical accompaniment. The entrance of the dance music is rendered imperceptible by the simple expedient of fading the music in to accompany Ninon's voice. As Ninon has slipped quite naturally from speech to song, she repeats the exercise by subordinating all her movements to the song's rhythm—at an undetermined point we suddenly recognize that the couple is dancing, yet we never saw them begin to dance. Just as their slow slipping from speech to song justifies a further sliding from song to musical accompaniment, so their transition from walking to dancing turns the space around them into a stage. Roland mocks Ninon's semicircular movements, and she, in turn, imitates his.

This dance number featuring Ninon and Roland is carefully choreographed in a manner that recalls the *bricolage* of the backstage format, which as Jane Feuer observes, became the hallmark of the MGM musical of the 1940s and 1950s (163). The dance takes place "backstage" where Roland designs stage sets that could be for theater, cinema, or ballet productions.<sup>7</sup> This décor contributes to the performance's appeal that is simultaneously based on self-conscious stylization as well as spontaneity. Rivette's choreography recalls a type of backstage *bricolage*, in which the performers make use of props-at-hand, such as curtains, umbrellas, or furniture to create the imaginary world of

the musical performance. For instance, the dazzling number "You Were Meant For Me" from the MGM musical *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) provides a reflexive instance of the code of *bricolage*. Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds enter a backstage space where Kelly has recourse to a wind machine, to stage lights, and a sunset backdrop in preparation for his declaration of love to Reynolds, who waits on a ladder that serves as her balcony. The dance number featuring Ninon and Roland is staged in a similar fashion, in a backstage studio where both exchange their rhymed repartee while standing on a painted set. At the close of their dance number, the welder's blowtorch produces a sparkling fireworks display, which is accompanied by an effervescent hissing. Here, the day-to-day world of objects and events become part of the Hollywood code of *bricolage* in which the "everyday" reality of the theater world is incorporated into the unreal of the staging of the dance number. As Jean-Jacques Delfour rightly observes, the sight and sounds of the blowtorch are simultaneously being viewed as part of preparations for a future, unspecified stage production and consequently, as part of the real world of events beyond the space of the actual performance taking place (168). I am suggesting that these intermittent eruptions of sparkling light within the frame must be viewed not only as decorative *bricolage*, designed to enhance the spectacle of the dancers' performance, but as reflexive, signaling to the spectator the director's concurrent "staging" of the profilmic performance. In this scene, the sparks from the welder's blowtorch self-consciously point to the space of the profilmic event *present* before us; they simultaneously index the everyday world of the narrative event, in which a stagehand is constructing sets for *future* performances. Thus, *Haut bas fragile* does not offer a Hollywood vision of the musical performance that creates the image of a utopian



reality—but offers instead the reality of an image. Rivette has remarked that he envisions a cinema in which “the principal priorities on the screen would be purely spectacular ones, in the strict sense of the word” (qtd. in *Nouvelle Critique* 49).

In *Haut bas fragile*, the intricate interweaving of different dance traditions complicates the repetition of musical numbers, accentuating rather than diminishing the film’s disjointed tone. For instance, almost immediately following the *atelier* dance number, Enzo Enzo performs the haunting song “Les Naufrages volontaires” at the dance hall *Backstage*. The lyrics seem to chart the characters’ movement across the dance floor and within the film’s diegesis:

Nothing can be done for the castaways who ride the great wave  
that rocks them to mysterious islands,  
Without a craft, without a raft,  
without leaving land,  
the castaways wander.

The music that animates “Les naufrages volontaires” suspends the flux of narration. In this musical number, the movement of the camera places the spectator in a participatory role alongside the dancers. As Delfour has observed, the camera movement during musical performances resembles the positioning of a dancer, for the camera has a back (169). Delfour argues that the dance aesthetic of the film differs from that of the Hollywood musical, where the star couple remains foregrounded and is always facing the camera (169). The choreographed dances performed at *Backstage* are modeled on those of the taxi-dance hall, where a bronze railing provides a boundary separating seated couples from dancers, who represent a diverse mixture of races, ethnicities, and age groups. As the music begins at *Backstage*, the camera glides past Enzo Enzo to frame an anonymous young couple spinning across the floor. Rivette’s camera imitates a dancer’s

movement, as it sweeps past this couple and then spins completely around in a 360-degree circle. The camera moves invisibly among the dancing couples, turning completely around once more to frame Ninon and Roland, as they emerge from the periphery of the floor. The camera focuses briefly on Ninon as a solo figure, whose pirouettes across the floor seem to replicate those of the camera. A single static shot frames her face that seems to return the camera's look, as though the camera apparatus has become her partner. At this moment, dance movement is suspended as the camera situates the spectator as a participant within the space of the profilmic performance.

Ninon's arresting glance back at the camera is caesural. One of the few medium close-ups in the film, the shot suspends motion, while recalling the camera's reflexive pause before the *bricoleur's* dazzling fireworks display earlier in Roland's studio. In this scene at *Backstage*, it becomes apparent that Ninon's distracted glance is actually fixed on Roland across the room, who has switched partners and is seen dancing with Louise. Ninon inches slowly and spasmodically across the dance floor to check out her competition, but the engaged couple quickly disperses. The music continues as Louise, followed by Ninon, ceremonially exits the dance hall, each of them striding nonchalantly and disappearing into a mirrored corridor. Within this scene at *Backstage*, the camera reproduces the movements of a dancer who moves in synchronous harmony with rhythm and sound. Consequently, the passive spectator is transformed into an active participant, engaged in the profilmic performance. Similar to the New York taxi-dance hall frequented by Miller during the 1920s, the circumscribed performance space of *Backstage* permits the pro-filmic spectator to transgress social boundaries vicariously. Preserving the anonymous character of the taxi-dance hall encounter, the mobile eye of

the camera enables the spectator to project him/herself into different class, gender, or racial roles. This capacity to identify with alternative theatrical roles is preserved through the profilic performance space of Rivette's taxi-dance hall.

The diegetic events are interwoven between the stanzas of "Les Naufrages volontaires" performed by Enzo Enzo and so, remain subordinated to the sensual rhythms of her song. Unlike the nondiegetic music of the Hollywood dance number that provides a release from the causal constraints of the diegesis, the diegetic music at *Backstage* establishes a causal connection to everyday events occurring within the world. Roland's exchange of dance partners interwoven between song stanzas at *Backstage* introduces a narrative thread that is taken up later when Ninon volunteers to deliver roses that have been sent to Louise from her dance partner, Roland. Ninon's easy movement through Paris back streets on roller blades creates a continuation of the spontaneous dance begun at *Backstage* the previous night. Her delivery of Roland's roses to Louise precipitates her confrontational conversation with Roland later that night at *Backstage*. His enigmatic answers about his relationship with Louise leave Ninon frustrated and annoyed, thus necessitating her solo performance on the dance floor in which bodily expression provides an implicit response. Ninon's revenge on Roland is not complete, however, until she joins forces with Louise against him. The two dancers perform a viciously liberating duet in which nondiegetic music propels the two up and down the staircase. Once again, the scene's dance choreography mimics that of the Hollywood musical. Ninon and Louise begin the number by melodizing their voice patterns as the lead-in to the entrance of musical accompaniment and dance movements:

Louise: I don't want to talk about it.

Ninon: We can talk of something else.

Louise: [. . .] must talk of something else.

Together: [. . .] talk of something else.

The extreme high and low angles that animate this dance number celebrate the reunion of two women—one from the haute bourgeoisie and the other from the lower class—through the everyday ritual of feminine friendship. This dynamic dance number reinvents the Hollywood musical number, which commemorates the reunion of the heterosexual couple. The homoerotic power of Ninon and Louise's dance is enormously powerful and subversive for it recodifies the Hollywood number where, as Jim Collins points out, "[. . .] the dance is repeatedly a metaphor for the sexual act" (143). The intimate dance of the two women initiates an alternative space of musical performance, which resembles a taxi-dance hall where dancers, as well as sideline profilmic spectators, may indulge in homoerotic fantasies. Unlike the Hollywood musical number that creates an unreal space that is marked off and segregated from the real world, the suggestive dance movements of Ninon and Louise advance the film's story, while initiating an intense and potentially transgressive relationship between the two women characters.

Through its intricate interweaving of different dance traditions in consecutive scenes, the film sets up a performance continuum designed to break down the borders between narrative and musical number. The film supplants the syntactical logic of the Hollywood musical, which determines the division between narrative and number, with its own idiosyncratic performance style. In *Haut bas fragile*, the borderline that distinguishes the world of the diegetic event from that of the dance number is intentionally blurred. The final scene between Louise and her bodyguard Lucien on the veranda of her apartment exemplifies the conflation of narrative event and musical number. As Louise moves from the apartment onto the veranda, she spins completely

around, smoothly integrating her dance step into her stride. Lucien then mimics this movement, spinning around a chair. Louise again reciprocates and rotates around, moving towards the same chair. The give-and-take conversational exchange of the couple remains natural up until this point, but here, both characters begin to repeat lines, making their voices conform to a rhythmic pattern. Brushing against a rocking chair, Lucien begins with the remark, "I love you so. I do everything backwards." Louise replies, "Say nothing. Keep quiet. Backwards and forward." The rocking movement of the chair that begins to move back and forth like a metronome mimics (as indeed does the two women dancing together) that of the characters' bodies and the content of their verbal exchange. At this point, the characters' speech patterns and body movement seem to justify the entrance of musical accompaniment, as in previous scenes. Yet, this scene frustrates the spectator's expectations. The couple's shift to balletic rotations and metrical voice patterns anticipates the musical accompaniment that never comes, and thus, this code of the Hollywood musical, the audio dissolve, is defamiliarized and rendered perceptible. During the scene, Louise and Lucien appear indefinitely suspended between the diegetic event and dance steps. The scene refuses to offer a musical affirmation or conventional closure. Like the characters, the spectator remains transfixed, momentarily suspended between meaning and movement.

This continual oscillation between meaning and motion in the film recalls *Ida's* search for the source of a song she thinks she hears or overheard before she was born and the anxiety of the girl-child's search for the first lost object, the Mother (or her synchdochic stand-in—her maternal voice). Like the rocking movement of objects and characters, *Ida's* incessant search throughout the film for a missing musical refrain

literalizes aurally (and narratively) the backwards and forwards movement of the *fort/da* game, a child's game of repetition designed to diminish the unpleasure caused by the absence of the mother.<sup>8</sup> This imaginary game, in which the child repeatedly pulls a toy reel back and forth, marks the child's initial attempt to master the drives through entry into language. This game of repetition, premised on the alternation of lack and plenitude, is set into motion in the film's unfolding. In his reformulation of Lacanian theory, Guy Rosolato has characterized the maternal voice as a "lost object," which comes to represent what alone can make good the subject's lack (qtd. in Silverman 85). Rosolato affirms that the primordial listening experience is the prototype for the pleasure that derives from music, but is quick to point out that this dream of recovering the mother's voice through music originates in an experience of division and loss, thereby testifying to lack:

Harmonic and polyphonic display can be understood as a succession of tensions and releases, of the union and the divergence of elements that are [...] opposed in their accords, in order then to be resolved in their most simple unity. It is then the whole drama of separated bodies and their reunion, which supports harmony. (qtd. in Silverman 85)

It is through music that *Haut bas fragile* works to interrogate the relationship of the spectator—above all the female spectator—to the cinema. The camera implicates the film viewer in Ida's attempt to recover the source of the aural "lost object," shadowing her movement from a downtown record store into a vacant hallway or stairwell, or from the dimly lit *Sarah Saloon* to the open-air hot dog stand frequented by Monsieur Paul, played by Rivette, in pursuit of a haunting refrain. Music gives the film as well as the librarian Ida (whose job at the Cabinet des Estampes in the Bibliothèque nationale is to oversee its etchings and photographs) an additional dimension. Music suspends the flux

of narration created through linguistic and iconographic sign systems, leaving the spectator momentarily entranced by its hallucinatory rhythms, harmonic resonance, and passion. The final shot of the film frames Ida in Renoirian style, in a deep focus long take that follows her flight down an empty boulevard. Unexpectedly, she refuses singer Anna Karina's offer of a cozy Paris apartment, forfeiting her final opportunity to secure a safe haven and retrieve the source of the mysterious musical refrain. Similar to the spectator, Ida is destined to remain a rootless "castaway," continuing to search for the coherent selfhood and sense of mastery that the myth of cinema and its music can no longer provide.

### **From the Fairground Format to the Happening**

Rivette returns to the variety format of the fairground in *Haut bas fragile* in order to acknowledge a diversity of viewer interests not yet subsumed under the spell of narrative forms of identification and subjectivity. The aesthetic principle of *Haut bas fragile* is based on the juxtaposition of diverse performance styles, and it is in this manner that the film recalls the particular format of programming that Gunning claims was common to early cinema and that was called the "variety format" (68). Prior to 1905, films were exhibited in a variety of institutional contexts, which, as Gunning points out, included vaudeville and variety shows, dime museums and penny arcades, summer parks, fairgrounds, and traveling shows (68). These institutions not only facilitated early film exhibition but also produced a specific format of programming, which Gunning defines as follows:

Film appeared as one attraction on the vaudeville program, surrounded by a mass of unrelated acts in a non-narrative and even nearly illogical succession of performances. Even when presented in the nickelodeons

that were emerging at the end of this period, these short films always appeared in a variety format [ . . . ]. (68)

Film before 1906, or what Gunning terms "the cinema of attraction," remained closer to the tradition of fairground and variety shows than to the classical priority of articulating a story (64). Gunning borrows the fairground term "attraction" from Sergei Eisenstein because he feels that avant-garde practice and early cinema shared a propensity for exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption. Indeed, early cinema proposed a different type of address than is found in later films—one dependent upon a theatrical aesthetic of display and demonstration (Gunning 66).

The return to a primitive mode of address is not unique to Rivette. In "Primitivism and the Avant-Gardes: A Dialectical Approach," Noel Burch points to the numerous and widespread correlations with the primitive cinema among modernist films from Europe produced in the years following the 1950s. Burch chooses to center his discussion, however, on the earlier 1930s work of Jean Cocteau who, he adds, may have been the first modernist director to have deliberately turned to primitive strategies as an "antidote" to the Institutional Mode of address (499). For instance, Cocteau's childhood memories of keyhole films, according to Burch, provided the basis for the sequence of *Hôtel des Folies Dramatiques* from *Le Sang d'un Poète/Blood of a Poet* (1930) (500). Burch concludes that insofar as the keyhole film represents a crucial point of articulation in the development of the Institutional Mode, its appearance in this sequence from *Le Sang d'un Poète* must be viewed as more than mere chance (499). Cocteau uses the keyhole device to ally apparently discontinuous fantasies within the *Hôtel des Folies Dramatiques* sequence. The overall structure of the sequence conforms to that of the variety program, as it proceeds in seemingly random order from the slow motion shooting



of a Mexican outlaw to a Chinese shadow puppet performance to the bizarre scene of a girl crawling crab-like across a wall. Rivette's return to a primitive mode of address in *Haut bas fragile* is modeled on Cocteau's. Similar to Cocteau's keyhole device that frames these varied scenes unfolding behind closed corridor doors, Rivette's use of the musical genre of *Haut bas fragile* provides a homogeneous context, which permits the spectator's transgressive engagement with diverse, individuated inflections of a singular stylistic mode. Like Cocteau in *Le Sang d'un Poète*, Rivette makes use of the variety format in *Haut bas fragile*, juxtaposing apparently discontinuous musical performance styles to structure the scenes and sequences of his film.

The compartmented structure that characterizes Cocteau's film resurfaces later in the New York Happenings of the 1960s, which were also based on a presentational aesthetic that, in many respects, resembled that of primitive cinema. The Happenings provided Rivette with an immediate and proximate source of inspiration, as Cologne, Germany served as the international hub during the 1960s for this peculiar brand of pop spectacle, whose practitioners included such celebrated artists, musicians, and dancers as Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, and Yvonne Rainer. Michael Kirby in his book *Happenings* claims that the "new theater" began with composer John Cage's performance at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1952; Happenings subsequently emerged to ignite the imagination of the New York and European art world (33). The first of the Paris Happenings occurred in May 25, 1964 and was organized by Jean-Jacques Lebel, their leading French exponent. Subsequent Paris Happenings that occurred in April and May of 1966 caused police to intervene and produced an animated journalistic response from *France-Soir* to the *Nouvel Observateur*. By 1968 more serious

studies on the phenomenon of the Happening were being published in France, such as Jean-Jacques Lebel's *La Poésie de la Beat-Generation* (1965) and *Le Happening* (1966). An entire issue of the scholarly journal *Revue l'histoire du théâtre* was dedicated to defining the Happening, describing it not only as "a new language of theater" but also a revolutionary art from a socio-political perspective (my translation, 8-10). In one essay "Qu'est-ce que 'le happening'?" the author defines the Happening as a potentially "political" demonstration and refers specifically to the events that occurred in response to the government ban on Rivette's *La Religieuse* (10). For Lebel, the Happening is a theater of protest, which does not have the same goals as traditional theater:

Its manner of directly posing the problem of communication and of perception, its resolve in recognizing and crossing those *forbidden territories* that have brought modern art to a halt, have necessitated a *new language* that will bring about a complete reexamination of the cultural and historical situation of art: this (new) language is the happening. (my translation, qtd. in "Qu'est-ce que le happening" 11)

Peter Brook echoes Lebel's claim in his assertion that the Happening is "a new broom of great efficacy" that is certainly "sweeping away the rubbish" of deadly forms (56).

While Lebel stresses the social and political dimension of the Happening, other artists, musicians, and writers place emphasis elsewhere. Painter Robert Rauschenberg claims that the Happening, "is an unraveling of facts, without logic or intention," while sculptor Claes Oldenburg claims that it consists in "breaking down utilitarian relationships: a man greets you while tipping his hat; repeated fifty times, the gesture loses its significance and becomes a provocation" (my translation, qtd. in "Qu'est-ce que le happening" 13). Musician John Cage refuses definition on principle: "When you define and break up artistic creations into a certain number of concepts, you take their life from them" (my translation, qtd. in "Qu'est-ce que le happening" 12). Kirby provides the

most succinct definition of the Happening: "a purposefully composed form of theatre in which diverse alogical elements, including nonmatrixed performing, are organized in a compartmented structure" (11). Refusing to adhere to traditional classical norms of theater, the Happening rejected Aristotelian tripartite form to adopt instead a structure that Kirby describes as "compartmented":

*Compartmented structure* is based on the arrangement and contiguity of theatrical units that are completely self-contained and hermetic. No information is passed from one discrete theatrical unit—or "compartment"—to another. The compartments may be arranged sequentially [. . .] or simultaneously [. . .]. (4-5)

Kirby points to Alan Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959) as one clear example of compartmentalization in which three separate rooms underscore the isolation of units functioning simultaneously, while the six separate parts emphasize the rupture in continuity (5). Kirby stresses that the organization of Cocteau's *Sang d'un Poète* with its four distinct parts tending towards compartmentalization provided a model for the Happenings (26). Films that used hallucinatory, dreamlike imagery provided the Happeners with another source of inspiration: Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's Surrealist dreamscape of *Un Chien Andalou/Andalusian Dog* (1929), the oneiric Dada ballet of *Entr'acte* (1924) by Picabia and René Clair, and the enchanted, fairy tale quality of *La Belle et la Bête/Beauty and the Beast* (1947) by Cocteau (Kirby 26). Happeners also drew on the fantastic, homemade quality of early cinema, such as Georges Méliès's 1902 film *Le Voyage dans la Lune/A Trip to the Moon* (Kirby 27). Like *Le Sang d'un Poète*, the Happening works like the well-arranged variety show, which accommodates discrete, individuated theatrical units, while functioning as a complete performance with its own overall quality and character.

The compartmented structure of the Happening complemented by its use of dreamlike, fantastic imagery recalls *Out 1*, which Rivette describes:

To begin with, play in all senses of the word was the only idea: the playing by the actors, the play between the characters, play in the sense that children play, and also play in the sense that there is play between the parts of an assemblage. This was the basic principle, implying a relative interdependence between the elements, and a relative distance maintained by the actors between themselves and the characters they were playing. (qtd. in Fieschi 876)

Similar to the participants in a Happening, each actor in *Out 1* performed from within a self-contained “compartment” unaware of the other actors’ actions within the film. Ogier remarks: “The actors did not know anything about each other’s roles, apart from the general schema of *L’Histoire des Treize* [. . .]. On principle, each actor remained unaware of what the others had done the previous day: It was a little like a soap opera filmed every day, in a way we did the sitcom well before everyone!” (my translation, qtd. in Frappat 140). Rivette adapted the compartmented structure of the Happening through the arrangement of self-contained units in his film, preventing the transmission of information from one discrete unit or “compartment” to another. In *Haut bas fragile*, each of the three women’s stories retains its autonomous stature as a performance, which can be fully understood without reference to any of the others. In many respects, the film’s structure resembles that of a three-ring circus, in which the ongoing flow of peripheral processions through Paris streets alternates with the more focused activities beneath the Big Top—at *Backstage*. Rivette uses the multi-focused format of the Happening to shape his film. He reinvents its singular performance style, in which performers are de-psychologized, and thus the presence of the three women characters remains largely behavioral: The spectator witnesses characters’ movements without ever

acquiring a sense of the psychological interiority characteristic, for example, of the classical realist novel. Indeed, the film's title points to its own tendency towards an exteriorized manner of presentation. As Delfour has observed, the words "*Haut bas fragile*" do not simply signify a set of postal markings stamped on a package but also index the surface characteristics of the three women characters, such as the *haut* (upper) bourgeois status of sleepwalker Louise, the *bas* (lower) class of delivery girl Ninon, and the *fragile* character of the adopted Ida (165). To extend Delfour's metaphoric reading, the spectator unpacks Rivette's express delivery, cautiously unfolding its tri-dimensional surface, yet is rarely permitted to catch more than a passing glimpse at its contents, which to a great degree remain a mystery.

Rivette accomplishes this effect of exteriority in *Haut bas fragile* through camera distance, a stylistic hallmark of primitive cinema. His camera uses the medium-long shot style associated with primitive cinema as it moves cautiously across the bodies of characters whose dance movements unfold at a distance and in this manner, mimics its a-psychological mode of address. At certain exceptional moments, however, the spectator is made privy to the women's secret motivations, aspirations, or feelings. Medium close-ups do occur in the film to underscore such moments, but rarely. For instance, a medium close-up reveals Ninon's duplicity, capturing her Judas kiss of Lise who is accused of the theft she committed, while exposing her concurrent glance at Roland who has just entered Sarah Saloon. Another such moment occurs during Ninon and Louise's dance together up the staircase; the long shot that initially frames their synchronous dance movements becomes a close-up that frames Louise's face approaching the camera and that reveals

her blissful expression. Rivette permits the unexpected medium close-up to disclose instantaneously a character's deeper psychological motivations.

While the medium close-up provides the audience with such rare disclosures, *Haut bas fragile* retains its alignment with early cinema through its use of primitive strategies. The multi-focus format common to early cinema that structures the film is also suggestive of the Happening, which often contained compartments that were dances or indeterminate systems of movement (Kirby 24). Analyzing a Happening called "Bus Palladium," Daniel Mothé comments on whether it resembles a voodoo rite or Batéké dance:

As in sacred dances, the officiating priest is alone with his interior world, and if he communicates, it is with the invisible, inaccessible beyond. However, the dance is not a ritual, it is spontaneous, created in its entirety at the moment; each dancer is free, but can become a master: it suffices for him to *discover an expression*, a movement which pleases and which leads others to imitate it. [. . .] This group that dances does not communicate through a shared rhythm or a collective conformism. This assemblage does not communicate through words either, for the noise is such that it precludes all exchanges of this kind. It seems, however, that this dissociated world has a certain coherence. This unity resides in the pleasure that each dancer experiences in liberating himself through his GESTURES. (my translation, qtd. in "Qu'est-ce que le happening" 14)

The author of "Qu'est-ce que 'le happening'?" claims that the Happening bears resemblance to Haitian voodoo and can be viewed, at once, as a ritual, a sacred ceremony, and an exorcism (32). Its eclecticism requires from its participants an *élan* of the soul, a "hallucinatory" state, which transforms them, in Lebel's terms, from voyeurs into visionaries (my translation, qtd. in "Qu'est-ce que 'le happening'" 30). In *Haut bas fragile*, Rivette returns to the primitive, plastic expression of dance that restores to the work of art its magical dimension and thereby, transforms the spectator into a visionary able to re-envision the world through an altered perception of it. This plastic language of

the Happening that Rivette reinvents in his film is, as Lebel reminds us, aligned with the tableau:

The happening is a tableau in the process of creation here and now, with its participants reunited within the same celebration: its language is a plastic language, a language of signs, to the extent that it is a question of presenting a certain number of images. It is a language of instincts, and not of reflection. Communication—if it takes place—is made from instinct to instinct, from nerve to nerve, from wave to wave. (my translation, qtd. in “Qu’est-ce que le happening” 27)

Rivette began with the Diderotian tableau in *La Religieuse*, which marshaled the actors’ gestures and movements in the service of a moral message. In *Haut bas fragile*, he transforms the tableau by eliminating its pedagogical quality and reinvents it in his film where it resembles an action painting without a canvas, an ad hoc creation that communicates through instinct and improvisation.

Similar to the Happening that relies on a hallucinatory estrangement associated with abstract rhythmic and visual patterns, Rivette’s film insists on pleasure. The pleasure takes multiple forms: the fanciful narrative patterning found in the film, the musical dance performances that suspend narration to induce an entranced participation, and finally, the sheer physicality of plastic expression. While Rivette draws on Hollywood’s pleasurable investment in musical spectacle, his film does not offer a Hollywood vision of the musical performance. The binary oppositions that determine Hollywood’s utopian landscape force the spectator to conflate words with song, life with illusion, the real with the ideal; Rivette’s film supplants this binary logic with its own idiosyncratic performance style. *Haut bas fragile* draws on multiple dance styles that when viewed together form what Siegfried Kracauer would characterize as “a fragmented sequence of sense impressions” (94). The audience enters a trance-like state and is

forced to encounter itself, its own reality as revealed in a ritualistic dance, which is ultimately derived from Artaudian theater aesthetics.

The presentational aesthetic of *Haut bas fragile* echoes the theater of Artaud in its insistence on a *mise-en-scène* that would place the spectator on stage alongside performers. Artaud aspired to create a “total theater,” which would inspire in his actors the sensation of a new bodily language no longer based on words but on signs.<sup>9</sup> Artaud’s notion of a “total theater” relied on a dynamic relation between diverse types of staging, including jokes, acrobatics, singing, and dancing, which would recreate the popular theater. In the essay “Theater of Cruelty,” Artaud claimed:

Practically speaking, we want to bring back the idea of total theatre, where theatre will recapture from cinema, music-hall, the circus and life itself, those things that always belonged to it. This division between analytical theatre and a world of movement seems stupid to us. One cannot separate body and mind, nor the senses from the intellect, particularly in a field where the unendingly repeated jading of our organs calls for sudden shocks to revive our understanding [. . .]. (109-110)

In *Haut bas fragile* Rivette reinvents this Artaudian total theater, in which the work of art would resemble an indispensable delirium moving through oppressive barriers and releasing those natural forces imprisoned by them. The fairground format common to both early cinema and Artaudian theater resurfaces in *Haut bas fragile* where it institutes a space of theatrical performance in which, in Deleuze’s terms, “the everyday body and the ceremonial body are discovered and rediscovered” (191).

Rivette’s cinematic style retroactively completes Artaud’s search for a theatrical language that would privilege spectacle as opposed to meaning. Modeled on the New York taxi-dance hall, *Haut bas fragile* assumes an interest in narrative just as polymorphous and diverse as the spectatorial pleasures it assembles. Rivette makes use



of the dancer's capacity to convey images of rebellion from social constraints, transforming the taxi-dance hall into an alternative space where three modern-day women project themselves into multiple theatrical roles, transgressing social, class, and gender boundaries. *Haut bas fragile* transforms the Paris landscape of Rivette's earlier films, such as his New Wave classic *Paris nous appartient* and the post-May '68 experimental film *Out 1*, into a multidimensional space of theatrical performance. Like Rivette's three *flâneuses*, the spectator is generously invited to become an impassioned participant in, as well as observer of, the everyday rituals of the city.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rivette's reinvention of Juliet Berto's role Frédérique from *Out 1* in *Haut bas fragile* pays homage to the actress following her untimely death in 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Film historian Doug Gomery in *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) attributes the nickelodeon's success to dual factors, which, in my opinion, also accounts for the subsequent rise of the taxi-dance hall. First, the popular entertainment industry was profiting from a prosperous economy and so, the spread of the nickelodeon was accompanied by a nationwide increase in public dance halls, vaudeville theatres, and amusement parks (21). Second, the population was growing primarily due to the influx of immigrants in larger cities (21). The strengthened economy and increased immigration would account for the rapid rise of both forms of commercialized recreation, for the same urban working-class that frequented the nickelodeon would also populate taxi-dance halls, stimulating their growth from city to city.

<sup>3</sup> As Lewis Jacobs observes in *The Rise of the American Film*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939), nickelodeons "were disdained by the well-to-do. But the workmen and their families who patronized the movies did not mind the crowded, unsanitary, and hazardous accommodations most of the nickelodeons offered" (56). The taxi-dance hall was also viewed as an illicit and illegitimate form of entertainment, primarily due to its racially mixed clientele and its potential for promiscuity. Paul Cressey in *The Taxi-Dance Hall* records the impressions of one visitor: "I had expected almost anything at this dance hall but even then I was surprised. It was the most speckled crew I'd ever seen: Filipinos, Chinese, Mexicans, Polish immigrants, brawny laborers, and high-school boys. . . The girls, themselves, were young, highly painted creatures, who talked little – and when they did speak used strange expressions to accentuate their talk. They spoke of "Black and Tans," "Joe's Place," "Pinoys," "nigger lovers," and used other terms with which I was not familiar" (31).

<sup>4</sup> In his review of *Tropic of Cancer* printed in *Orbes* in 1935, Blaise Cendrars's warm accolade reflects the respect and affection of the French for Henry Miller: "Henry Miller is one of us, in spirit, in style, in his power and in his gifts, a universal writer like all those who have been able to put into a book their own vision of Paris" (24). François Truffaut, Rivette's closest friend among the New Wave directors, also expressed his admiration for Miller in his compendium of critical essays, *Les Films de ma vie*, whose very title is borrowed from Miller's *The Books In My Life*. In this confessional film journal (which is dedicated to Rivette), Truffaut proclaimed that film had never attained, but should aspire to, the eroticism and freedom of Miller's prose (18). In *Haut bas fragile*, Rivette's willingness to act on Truffaut's advice is evident.

<sup>5</sup> The song's lyrics are as follows (*La Bête humaine*. Dir. Jean Renoir. Paris Films, Robert Hakim, 1938):

Ninette's little heart /I tell you in confidence  
Is open to everyone who wants it /but is never given.  
Too bad for anyone who tries /to make love to her.  
Who wants to love Ninette /will have to suffer.

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Rick Altman's discussion in *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) of diegetic music in the Hollywood musical, which, he argues, functions as a bridge that connects the real world of "natural causality" and the ideal world of "rhythmical causality" (65).

<sup>7</sup> Critic Jonathan Rosenbaum points out that Roland's atelier was actually the studio soundstage that Rivette used for interiors of *Jeanne la Pucelle* (1994). See "Ragged But Right." Rev. of *Haut bas fragile*, dir. Jacques Rivette. *Chicago Reader* Movie Review 26 July 1996.  
<<http://www.chireader.com/movies/archives/0796/07266.html>>

<sup>8</sup> See Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Standard Edition. Vol. 18. London: Hogarth Press, 1955) in which Freud explains the *fort/da* game. The child, who possesses a cotton reel with a piece of string attached to it, throws the reel over his/her bedside and utters sounds that Freud understood as the German "fort," meaning "away." The child then pulls the reel back into his/her field of vision, greeting its reappearance with the word "da" or "there." As Madan Sarup explains in *An Introductory Guide to Poststructuralism and Postmodernism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), the game allowed the child to move "from the mother to the reel and finally to language" (8).

<sup>9</sup> As E. T. Kirby notes in the "Introduction" to *Total Theatre* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1969), the origin of the term "total theatre" is derived from Richard Wagner's concept of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which is "a 'collected,' 'united,' 'whole,' or 'total artwork'" (xiii). Kirby notes that while the notion of totality is most often indicated by a list of elements such as music, movement, scenery, lighting, more important to the

Wagnerian ideal is the understanding that must be an interplay among the diverse elements or a synthesis of them (xiii).

## CHAPTER 7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Barthes proclaims that "There is no theatre without a devouring theatricality—in Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Brecht, the written text is carried along by the externality of bodies, objects, situations; the utterance explodes into substances (*Critical Essays* 26). Paradoxically, as Jacques Araszkieviev points out in "La Genèse de la Théâtralité," theatricality for Barthes is both present "in the germ" of the work, while simultaneously incorporated within an actualized and sensual order of objects (and the presence of the body of the actor), the apparent excess of an exterior language (22). I attempted to show in this dissertation how "theatricality" as a potential presence in the theatrical work infiltrates and inflects Rivette's auteurist cinema. In its attempt to trace the presence of the gestural and iconic codes of theater that become evident in Rivette's films, my discussion lends credence to Barthes and Araszkieviev's claim that theatricality is not only potentially present in the written text but is also retrievable in the actualized, "external language" of a work (22).

Whereas for Barthes theatricality is nonspecific and may migrate to other art forms, Bazin points to drama as the commutable quality of the theater body, "Drama is the soul of the theater, but this soul sometimes inhabits other bodies" (81). If we pursue the logic of Bazin's statement, we must assume that the play cannot help but be dramatic, whereas a novel or a film is free to be dramatic or not. For Bazin, however, drama is separate from theatricality, which he defines as the *locus dramaticus* where theatrical

performance is cut off from the real world. The theatricality that marks Rivette's *oeuvre* provides an implicit challenge to Bazin who sought to liberate cinema from its reliance on theater, locating cinematic specificity within a dramaturgy of nature where the actor is no longer essential.

Rivette's use of theatrical decor in his films represents a departure from the dramaturgy of nature that Bazin envisioned. Both critics, however, dismiss the notion of the actor's presence as an issue that definitively sets theater apart from cinema. Bazin did not view the ontological problem of the actor's presence as an aesthetic moat that separated cinema from theater, but rather as a bridge potentially uniting them. Similarly, Rivette discusses the presence of the actor in theater and cinema as constructed through elements common to both—the voice, the look, and a sense of timing. Rivette confides in a personal interview:

In the theater, what is most important for the actor is the voice. While cinema and theater share this common element, in the theater, the voice becomes more important in establishing the actor's presence in the scene. The other element that cinema and theater share is the look. The look establishes the actor's presence in the cinema; by comparison, it plays a minimal role in the theater. What is more important in the theater is the actor's sense of timing, which is also important in cinema, but not to the same degree.

Whereas Bazin defines the actor's presence in the cinema as "delayed and deferred," thereby mitigating the problem of presence, Rivette points to the three elements shared by cinema and theater, which are evident in each art form in varying degrees and which each contribute differently to the perception of the actor's presence in the scene. For Rivette, cinema is thus not irrevocably separated from theater due to the actor's physical presence; in both arts, the actor establishes variable degrees of presence and absence,

articulated across the three modalities of the look, the voice, and timing that are modulated by the director. Rivette affirms:

All films are about the theatre, there is no other subject. It is the easy thing, of course, but I am more and more persuaded that one must do the easy things, and leave the difficult things to the pedants. If you take a subject which deals with the theatre to any extent at all, you're dealing with the truth of the cinema: you're carried along. It is not by chance that, among those films that we love, are those that directly deal with this subject, and one realizes afterwards that all the others, Bergman, Renoir, the good Cukors, Garrel, Rouch, Cocteau, Godard, Mizoguchi, are there as well. This is because theatre is the subject of truth and of lies, and there is no other subject in the cinema: it provides an interrogation of the truth, with means that necessarily lie. The subject of the representation. Taking it as the subject of a film is being honest, so it must be done. (my translation, *Cahiers* no. 204, 15)

Rivette does not intend to theatricalize cinema, but rather uses theater in his films to assist him in overcoming the facility of the cinematic machine and thereby to achieve what he believes to be cinema's vocation—a true realism (Aumont 236).

To this end, Rivette relies on Sartrean situationist strategies in *Paris nous appartient*, transforming the spectator into both a witness of and participant in an aesthetic ritual. The staged rehearsals of Shakespeare's *Périclès*, in which the proscenium stage, the troupe, and decor form an exteriorized language, force our attention to the theatrical codes that inflect both the production of the play and the film. In such scenes, the film spectator is situated as a witness to a play that is unfolding, whereas in the film, the spectator is situated as a witness to an historical drama, which shifts between the conspiracy stories of Balzac and boulevard de Crime to those of postwar Paris. Drawing on situationist theater, *Paris nous appartient* deals with questions of personal culpability, examining the connections between modern history, capitalist expansionism, and violence. The existential struggle of a Paris theater director

attempting to produce an obscure play that is central to the film mirrors Rivette's own commitment to present the plight of the individual determined to combat those institutional forces that conspire to delimit his freedom. Theatrical ritual positions the spectator of *Paris nous appartient* not only as a witness to history, but as a participant in it, authorized to retake Paris from the collaborationist Vichy government, and, even more directly, from Francoist Spain in the shadow war of exiled warriors.

In *La Religieuse*, the codes of theater are internalized within the film text, where they give expression to Rivette's adaptation of Diderot's novel. The opening scene of the film in which Suzanne Simonin refuses her vows before an audience of witnesses is reminiscent of a botched theater performance, which will subsequently require additional restagings. In this scene, Rivette brings together all the elements that were present previously in the rehearsal scene from *Paris nous appartient*—the ingénue actress, the script, the stage, and an audience of witnesses, who condemn her poor performance—to draw an implicit comparison between theatrical and religious ritual, thereby making explicit the connection between theatrical staging and the ideological staging of institutions.

While Rivette's adaptation of *La Religieuse* is based largely on Diderotian dramaturgy (as well as his actual experience as *metteur-en-scène* at Studio des Champs-Élysées where he directed the play), it also contains allusions to the paintings of Enlightenment artists Greuze and Fragonard, whose tableaux preoccupied Diderot. This tendency towards pictorial citation that originates in *La Religieuse* later emerges in his adaptation of Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights/Hurlevent* (1985), where he finds inspiration in the illustrations of Balthus. More recently, Rivette has shifted his focus to

concentrate on the evolving relation between the painter and the canvas in his adaptation of the Balzac novella *La Belle Noiseuse* (1991), a contemplative study of artistic engagement that garnered the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival. While I approach painting in this dissertation as a singular dimension of the theatricality of Rivette's films, my future research might include a comprehensive discussion of the encounter of cinema and painting in his work.

As in *Paris nous appartient*, Rivette in *Out 1: Noli me tangere* once again explores the parameters of theatricality through the filmed rehearsal. Yet rather than the recitation of scripted lines from Shakespeare that the actress Anne Goupil intones, in *Out 1*, sounds become important in themselves, reflecting Artaud's belief that sounds should be understood as a means to restore to the stage the incantatory rhythm of a universal language. Rather than the traditional mythic forms that subtended Sartrean dramaturgy, in *Out 1*, Rivette relies on the strategies of the Grotowskian Laboratory Theater, where myth becomes "incarnate in the fact of the actor, in his living organism" (Grotowski 33). In the Grotowskian theater, the violation of the taboo of the body returns the spectator to a primeval mythical situation. The "austere, moral, mythic, and ceremonial aspect" ("Myth" 42) of the Sartrean situationist theater provides Grotowski with the backdrop against which he conceives of a theater where the laws of time, gravity, and natural logic are suspended. In *Out 1*, the "situation" in the Sartrean sense has metamorphosed into a brutal Grotowskian moment, where the spectator is forced to "touch an extraordinarily intimate layer, exposing it," so that finally, "the life-mask cracks and falls away" (Grotowski 33). Rivette uses theatrical strategies in *Out 1* to achieve confrontation with myth, rather than identification through it.



Taken together, *L'Amour fou* and *Out 1* represent a stylistic revolution that coincides not only with Rivette's completion of the documentary *Jean Renoir, le Patron*—a deeply personal portrait of the director who most directly influenced him—but also with the revolutionary events of May 1968. While this study does not include an intensive analysis of the four-hour *L'Amour fou* (the title taken from André Breton's surrealist text), it is clear that Rivette's experimentation in this earlier film with temporal duration, reflexive textuality, and *mise-en-abyme* structuring provided the impetus for his more radical work in *Out 1*, where he pushes beyond the boundaries imposed by narrative, script, and acting style to explode the process of artistic creation. In the thirteen-hour film, Rivette reworks the strategies of Absurdist drama and the American theatrical experiments of the 1960s, specifically a brand of avant-garde spectacle called "the Happening," which sought to eliminate the Aristotelian division between stage and audience to create a more vertiginous construction of space.

As in *Paris nous appartient*, the filmed theater rehearsal in *Out 1* serves as a reflexive strategy, transforming the diegesis into successive intervals calibrated to a final performance that never occurs. As discussed in previous chapters, the reflexive theatricality that Rivette achieves in his films is associated with the wider political and social trends in postwar France with its renewed interest in such categories as aesthetics, subjectivity, and experience rethinking Marxist arguments. The trajectory of Rivette's work does in fact offer a counter-Brechtian tradition insofar as the theatrical tendency of his cinema provides an alternative response to the contemporary crisis in representation associated with the world-historical "decline of the aura" (Benjamin 222). The Brechtian tendency responded to the "banalizing trend" (Debord 38) characteristic of

cinematographic modernity by reflecting the decline of the aura, whereas the theatrical tendency of Rivette's cinema protested the reintegration of art into the mundane world of utilitarian consumerism by promising a restoration of aura through recourse to a secularized ritual.

Music accrues significance in Rivette's *oeuvre*, where it serves as a substitute for myth, often providing the point of intersection between theatrical and cinematic ritual. The mythic "Music of the Apocalypse" provides the sole source of inspiration for the theater production of *Périclès* and for the spectral "shadow war" that surrounds the troupe. The regenerative role of music is perhaps most evident in *Haut bas fragile*, where the missing melody "Mon amant perdu" ("My Lost Love") motivates the young woman Ida's search through labyrinthine Paris streets, leading her "backstage" where she is finally able to retrieve her sense of selfhood. This use of music in *Haut bas fragile* recalls the operatic form of "le chant dans le chant" ("the chant within the chant"), which engages feminine destiny as a region of mythic memory (Loubinoux 87). The mysterious force of "le chant dans le chant" and the power of the ballad to precipitate unusual exchanges between the characters is strangely similar to the characters' use of incantation in *Out 1*; the magical recitations of *Les Treize* (*The Thirteen*) are associated with the chant, which opposes the world of the everyday and promises characters protection from the world of potentially menacing signs that surround them.

Among those films that comprise the cycle *Les Filles du feu*, *Noroît* is perhaps the most indebted to musicality and myth in its conception, creating its fantastic dimension through theatrical *mise-en-scène*, elliptical verse, and improvised song that disclose the legacy of operatic style passed on to Rivette from Jean Cocteau, and, ultimately, from

Maurice Maeterlinck and Claude Debussy. Invoking the mysticism of Gérard de Nerval's symbolist poetics, *Noroît* constructs an esoteric world of Celtic goddesses who inhabit an enchanted island. The operatic ballad form appears once again in the key scene where a young woman Erika is found seated alone at the tower window singing a melancholy Celtic ballad, the only substantial solo in the film that invokes Mélisande's solo in Debussy's opera. Rivette reworks the operatic ballad form in this film where it engages his female characters who become "inhabited, haunted by some archaic song that awakens strange resonance in them" (Loubinoux 86). Throughout Rivette's *oeuvre*, music promises the restoration of aura through the remembrance of an archaic, esoteric universe of myth and magical association.

While this project has for obvious reasons concentrated on those films which foreground theatricality, I hope that it has succeeded in placing the films within the broader context of Rivette's *oeuvre*. I have attempted to demonstrate that each film has threads that tie it to others, while exploring the interwoven texture of similar themes or highlighting those inaugural moments that anticipate issues addressed in later films. The theme of female friendship in *Noroît* and the suggestion of desire between women in *Haut bas fragile* point to additional perspectives that would encompass the inscription of gender in the films. In *Céline and Julie vont en bateau*, the film whose commercial release coincided with the crest of post-68 feminism, an occult theatricality allows Rivette to explore the dimensions of female friendship. The film depicts the evolving relation between two women, a librarian and a magician, who both witness a bizarre melodrama being staged within a haunted house and decide to magically intervene as actresses in the "theatrical" scenes that are being rehearsed there. In *La Bande des quatre*

(1988), Rivette continues the theme of feminine friendship within the contemporary setting of a Paris theater school where four apprentice actresses, mentored by their demanding *directrice*, stage seventeenth-century plays. In the recent *Jeanne la Pucelle* (1994), history is transformed into a stage where the story of the Christian martyr and mystic Joan of Arc is re-envisioned as a contemporary feminist parable. Rivette's authorial signature is typified as much by the manner in which theatricality inflects his films, as by the way gender and female sexuality is constructed from a male point of view. Future work might address the unique position Rivette holds in the history of French filmmaking for his sensitive treatment of the histories and destinies of women.

In his more recent films, Rivette continues to reinvent American film genres through reference to theatrical styles in *Secret Défense* (1998), a Hitchcockian thriller, and most recently, in *Va savoir* (2001), a romantic farce modeled on the classical screwball comedies of Howard Hawks in which an actress returns to Paris to perform in a Pirandello play directed by her lover. In *Va savoir*, the relation between theater and cinema is asymptotic: Rivette recommences at the point along the curve where profilmic performance is separated from the *locus dramaticus*, which is defined as the place of the play's performance, yet as we follow the film's narrative trajectory, the two separate spaces of theater and cinema, linked by the two texts of Pirandello and Rivette, move closer and closer together until in the final scene they have reached the point of infinity—seemingly indistinguishable from each other, yet never identical. Indeed, Rivette returns to a point of origin in *Va savoir*—a sunlit stroll along the banks of the Seine, which inspires the casual flirtation between an aging Italian director and a young student, recasts the dark Paris landscape of *Paris nous appartient* where Gerard Lenz and Anne Goupil's

promenade across the moonlit pont des Arts metamorphoses into a mysterious scenario of murder and conspiracy. The repetition of themes and the circularity of the films' narrative structures, from the relationship between the theater director and the student in *Va savoir* to that in *Paris nous appartient*, reflect Rivette's return to the labyrinthine décor characteristic of his early work and to the disguised semi-autobiographical story elements that characterized it. Two years before the release of *Va savoir*, Rivette confided to me at Café de la Bastille that, of all his films, *Paris nous appartient* and *L'Amour fou* were the two that he viewed as autobiographical, to a certain extent.

Whatever Rivette's future projects, it is certain that he is still engaged in shaping the course of contemporary French cinema, as he occupies a unique position in its history, for his personal vision that, in concert with the initiatives of his New Wave contemporaries, transformed filmmaking by taking it out of commercial studios and into the streets of Paris, for his significant perception that one might discover the cinema through theater, but perhaps most importantly, for his sense of commitment to the plight of the individual and his persistent determination to combat those institutional forces that conspire to delimit human freedom.

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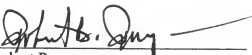
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Mary Wiles received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English at Southern Methodist University. She received her Master of Arts degrees in film studies and in French from the University of Iowa. She received her doctorate from the University of Florida.


I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

  
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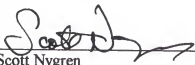
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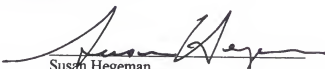
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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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